

PART 5



Keynotes

THE LESSONS AND LESIONS OF HISTORY: YELLOWSTONE AND PROGRESS

Patricia Nelson Limerick



THE PHRASE, “THE LESIONS OF HISTORY,” originated a few years ago, when I was writing a speech on natural resources management. I had covered the usual survey of challenges and dilemmas, and I was trying to devise a transition to a cheerful conclusion where I would talk about the valuable lessons that Western history could teach us. But the unconscious is a powerful force. *Via* Freudian typing, I transformed a declaration that I would discuss the “lessons of history” into a declaration that I would discuss the “lesions of history.” Contemplating this remark sent me to a dictionary, which told me that a lesion was “an injury, hurt, damage, or other change of an organ or tissue of the body tending to result in impairment or loss of function.” Lessons of history and lesions of history: surely they are both part of our historical heritage, and the value and trustworthiness of the lessons would surely be diminished if we did not also reckon with the lesions.

The displacement of the Sheepeaters, the Indian natives of Yellowstone, and white Americans’ contemptuous appraisal of those people, is certainly one of those local lesions. The ruthless poaching of park animals in the early years of the park; the often well-intentioned errors and miscalculations strung through the history of wildlife management in the park; the exclusiveness, in terms of both class and race, of access to Yellowstone; the bitter and persistent frictions between local ranchers and park officials; the recent both angry and anguished struggle over the bison; the shameful stinginess of Congress in funding the park: it is no particular strain to come up with a sizable list of the lesions of Yellowstone history, with many of them persisting, just as the dictionary said lesions would, as “impairment and loss of function.”

The subtitle of this essay, however, contains a word with a quite different spirit—the word “progress.” In the olden days of the West, that word was invoked regularly and almost religiously. The ritual use of the word progress once characterized public life in the West, but it has now fallen into disuse and even disrepair.

In that context, it may not sound entirely platitudinous, and it may sound surprising if I take this occasion, the 125th Birthday of Yellowstone National Park, to congratulate the park and its managers on the *progress* they have made. To take one example, even if ecosystem management has sometimes stumbled and staggered in its applications at Yellowstone, it is itself a development that is entitled to wear the label progress. To take another example, when one remembers how exclusive, in both racial and gender terms, employment in the National Park Service once was, it is a very glorious turn of events, and surely a mark of progress, to hear of Robert Stanton’s

appointment as Director, as well as to see the growing range and number of people of color involved in outdoors issues. And, as one final compelling example, recall to memory the park's first superintendent, Nathaniel Langford, characterized by Paul Schullery as "a tireless and unethical promoter who left a legacy of shifty dealings and indignant business associates."¹ Now, if you can look at Nathaniel Langford and then look at the current superintendent, Mike Finley, and *not* have the word "progress" come to mind, then you are indeed a very hard nut to crack.

It is, I will be frank, a novel and interesting experience for me to use this word publicly, without apology, without irony, and without quotation marks. When I have used the word progress in the recent past, I have always been thinking of it as an artifact from the earlier times of Manifest Destiny, when many white Americans believed that the settlement of the American West was the nation's clearest demonstration and proof of progress. Indeed, with thoughts of that earlier enthusiasm for the word in mind, it is easy to remember why I, and many others, stopped using it: progress had lost so much of its utility because it had spent so much of its time working in support of questionable, lesion-producing causes. The progress of the nineteenth-century West so often worked to the benefit of one group while working to the injury of many others that it seemed better just to let the word go.

So why reconsider? Recently, I was on a panel with the very gifted science writer Timothy Ferris, who is a man to whom the adjective "timid" has never been applied. In the course of a panel discussion, I tiptoed up on referring to some change in societal attitude as "progress," and then I visibly and noticeably shied away, explaining that the awareness of multiple perspectives on the word's meaning kept me from using it. At that point, Tim Ferris pointed out that the very same people who say that we cannot talk about "progress" are, in fact, often people who are free and easy with the use of the word "decline." In other words, many of us have accepted the notion that calling a line of human activity "progress" is inappropriate, given our understanding of the relativism thinly disguised in the term. And yet, when we want to characterize another line of human activity as "decline," or "loss," or "injury," we strike out the quotation marks and *just say it*, discarding all the fine-tuned sensitivity to point of view that governed us when we surrendered and abandoned the use of the more encouraging and heartening word.

When Tim Ferris made fun of my refusal to say the p-word, I gained a sudden recognition that we are very strict about following the rules of relativism and recognizing diversity of point of view when it comes to good news, and we entirely discard strict enforcement of those rules when it comes to bad news. Mark Twain put this another way: A cat that has stepped on a hot stove, he said, will *never* step on a hot stove again, but she'll never step on a *cold* stove, either. We all learned that progress was a loaded word, and a word that had inflicted more than its share of lesions. So we stopped using it, as we set out to show the public how complicated, how muddled, how multiple in its meanings history is.

What we—and I certainly include myself in this—did not recognize was how much the members of the public still had an enthusiasm, an appetite, and a yearning for something that they can label, recognize, and support as progress. Regular people want to believe that history comes with vectors. Nations get richer; nations get

poorer. Power gets centralized; power gets decentralized. Laws become fairer; laws become less fair. Things get better; things get worse.

In recent years, what many of us saw as a campaign to enrich and enliven history made many segments of the public surprisingly cranky and resistant, and I suspect that this rejection of the idea of progress contributed considerably to the crankiness. Our earnest efforts to recognize diversity and complexity of point of view in history made a complete hash of this understandable desire to know which way things were going, and ideally to know that things were going up and getting better. But we would not say “progress,” though we would sometimes say decline, and this now seems, in hindsight, to have been a considerable strategic error. We might do a lot better, in pushing for good causes like the proper funding and support of Yellowstone, if we abandoned this prissiness and used the word progress, and used it actively and intentionally, to enlist support and engagement.

In trying to give up this prissiness myself, I have thought about forming a Prissiness Recovery Support Group, but I am not entirely sure I would like the kind of person who would might appear as a member of such a group. But if I do form this support group, we will have one special division in which I, alas, will have to play a leadership role, a division set aside for Those Recovering From Prissiness Attached to Saying the Words Nature or Natural—those who start to say “nature” and then flinch as they realize how much of what we call “natural” has been transformed by human thought and action.

So I am trying to repossess our right to refer to progress, and to reassert our right to define its contemporary meaning. There is a chance that some readers will put this essay down and report to others, “This may seem incredible, but I just read a piece in which Patty Limerick has become a cheerleader! A booster! An advocate of Positive Thinking! A champion of progress!” To fend off this misreading, let me stress that I am advocating the redefinition of progress into a meaning quite different from the usual booster meanings. Some might say that I have, indeed, been driven over the edge by too many defensive old Western historians denouncing me as “too negative” and “too disillusioning.” Whatever the provocation, it is hard to deny that I and other writers have been very effective at noticing, labeling, and announcing dilemma and decline. I would like us to be equally good at noticing, labeling, and announcing progress, intelligently redefined.

Why has this been so difficult to do? In the 1990s, people—particularly people of my age group—have a way of experiencing frustration as if it were personal injury. When we want something, we, at best, get part of what we want. This has been a very common pattern in the history of human undertakings, but it is not uncommon, in the 1990s, for people having an experience of incomplete satisfaction, to act as if they have taken a novel and unique blow. Instead of saying, “It is great that we got *something*; at least we made some progress,” we are much more inclined to say, “Phooey, we are getting nowhere.” This stinginess in the recognition of progress is partly a function of a long-term habit of mind in the United States that, despite enormous evidence on the other side, continues to hold out hope for perfectability and unambiguous success. While that habit of mind seems, superficially, to be optimistic, it can actually make anything short of a stunning victory into a failure

and a disappointment. But I also think that there is a babyboomer factor at work in this attitude, as well, a part of a surprisingly well-established world view that says that, since we did not get to stay twenty-one forever, we have been ripped off and subjected to cruel injustice.

In that framework, it is not surprising that, when the *Denver Post* ran its “Yellowstone at 125” article in 1997, the sentence that summed up the article, in big letters on the first page, said, “The world’s first national park finds its luster fading under pressures of overcrowding, pollution, and game management.”²²

Well, Happy Birthday to You, Too.

If the *Denver Post* were to decide to run a birthday salute for me, in the spirit of their Yellowstone Birthday salute, the headline would probably say: “Boulder’s Most Over-Publicized Historian Finds Her Luster Fading Under Pressures of Overcommitment, Depletion of Mental Energy, and Problems of Time Management.” I hope, however, that the headline writers’ approach to Yellowstone’s metric moment does not signal a new trend in birthday cards. I hope that Hallmark is not preparing a line of babyboomer cards that mimic the spirit of many of the media observations of the Yellowstone birthday: “Happy Birthday, You Pathetic Old Wreck and Relic! We Have Been Completely Amazed to Hear That You, Apparently, Are Still Clinging to Life!”

After reading some of these Yellowstone birthday acknowledgments, it is considerably more pleasant, if also a little disorienting, to escape the late twentieth century and return to the late nineteenth century, to read the sentiments of people to whom the designation of Yellowstone as a national park was so recent that they felt obliged to celebrate it, since they certainly could not imagine taking it for granted.

It is a treat to read these accounts of early visitors to the park because so many of them were so profoundly overcome by wonder at what they saw. Every one of them seems to have gone through a ritual of saying that words could not possible capture what the eye could see in Yellowstone, and then every one of them wrote hundreds and hundreds of words, anyway. Near the end of this essay, I will contrast the early travelers’ sense of astonishment, novelty, freshness, encounter-with-never-seen-or-imagined-phenomenon, with an equally powerful and persuasive—maybe *more* powerful and persuasive—form of perception of Yellowstone available to us today. We should certainly be struck by the way in which early visitors exclaimed, gaped, gasped, and found themselves startled, stunned, and swept away by the sublime. But we need not make ourselves feel bad by falling into the misapprehension that *all* of our nineteenth-century predecessors were so alert, alive, and responsive to sensation that we look deadened, by contrast. We ought to keep in mind remarks like this one, from an early British visitor, commenting on his company as he looked at the Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone: “I saw some tourists viewing this stupendous work of nature with as little concern as they might have exhibited at a show of Punch and Judy.”²³ This is a quotation that should, at the very same moment, make us feel better and worse.

While we are attempting to keep from melting into envy of our predecessors a century ago, it is also important to remind ourselves how ruthlessly exclusive, in class and race, early Western tourism was, and later Western tourism often remains.

Yellowstone, one British nobleman put it, “is accessible to all who have leisure, money, and inclination to travel.”⁴ While an “inclination to travel” may have been very widely distributed in the population at large, leisure and money have been much more narrowly distributed.

It is striking, as well, to see how many early visitors to Yellowstone referred to African American servants. Sir Rose Lambart Price found his trip to Yellowstone made much more comfortable by the services of what Sir Price called “my man,” a “coloured trooper,” “a capital servant” who, Sir Price said (in phrasing that, as a Past President of the American Studies Association, I am required to find very revealing in its gender and racial politics), “was as sympathetic and attentive as a woman.”⁵ The famed Washburn/Langford/Hedges party of 1870 included “two colored cooks.”⁶ A visitor in 1896 remarked on “the staff of coloured waiters in the dining-room” in a park hotel.⁷ The 1874 expedition of the Earl of Dunraven, included “Maxwell, a gentleman of colour, who fulfilled the important functions of barber and cook.”⁸ All of these references to coloured servants remind us that Yellowstone, from its beginnings as a national park, has been anything but an escape from the usual American arrangements of power, as they have been stratified by race and class.

And yet many of the early visitors were profoundly aware that Yellowstone *did* represent a new state of affairs in the arrangements of federal power. “If Government had not promptly stepped in,” the Earl of Dunraven put it, Yellowstone “would have been pounced upon by speculators, and the beauties of Nature, once disposed of to the highest bidder, would have been retailed at so much a look to generations of future travellers.” This suspension of the free exercise of private property by the creation of a public reserve was, the Earl said, “an act worthy of a great nation.”⁹

Touring the park in 1896, the traveler and lecturer John Stoddard compared the wisdom of national preservation policy to the wisdom of God, a comparison that you do not hear every day in our times. The park was guarded on three sides by “lofty, well-nigh inaccessible mountains,” Stoddard said, “as though the Infinite Himself would not allow mankind to rashly enter its sublime enclosure”; in this respect, Stoddard concluded, “our Government has wisely imitated the Creator.” The Government had received Yellowstone as “a gift of God, and, as His trustee, holds it for the welfare of humanity.” Stoddard’s favorable opinion of the government correlated directly to a considerably less favorable opinion of human nature. Watching the geysers, he said, “I realized then, as never before, the noble action of our Government in giving this incomparable region to the people”; without that noble action, Stoddard felt, “the selfishness and greed of man would have made a tour here almost unbearable,” fencing off geysers and charging viewers for access.¹⁰

In a slightly more secular version of this claim, Hiram Chittenden noted the extreme good luck in the *timing* of this story. Longer than many other Western areas, Yellowstone remained unknown to most white Americans, and Chittenden thought that this was providential. “Had it been known at an earlier date, its fate would be deplorably different.” Instead, the full discovery by white Americans was “delayed until the government was prepared actively to consider the matter,” “until the time arrived when the government could effectually reserve it from settlement.”¹¹

In these appraisals, providence engages in a delicate mission of timing, keeping

Yellowstone hidden from the ravenous American public while the federal government hatches, incubates, and gains strength. While it may make a rather melancholy contrast with public attitudes of our times, this is still a very striking scenario. Waiting for the federal government to reach a state of readiness thus becomes a little like waiting for Luke Skywalker, in *Star Wars*, to undergo his training with Yoda and get himself in shape to fight the Empire. In Chittenden's scenario, the federal government is a promising youngster, watched over carefully as it grows and gains in power (Who was its Yoda? Evidently a consortium of Radical Republicans), until the central government finally reaches a mature power that allows it to rescue Yellowstone.

However this faith may hold up in our times, reading these tributes to the lucky timing of the federal government's actions in Yellowstone is a way of reawakening ourselves to the fact that Yellowstone's status as a national park is nothing to take for granted, that the state of affairs could easily have been otherwise, and, while we are certainly free to grouse over how national parks are mismanaged or overused or underfunded, we also have to be very happy that national parks exist, in order for us to agonize over their condition.

Here, in the same spirit of late nineteenth-century cheer, is Sir Rose Lambart Price reporting in 1898 on his visit to Yellowstone:

Our American cousins have... conferred a benefit on the entire world by preserving [Yellowstone] for the national use. It makes me shudder to think what might have happened, but for the wise forethought that dedicated this grand property to the people of America and their heirs forever.¹²

Let us make use of Sir Price's observation, as a way to reawaken wonder: let us join him in a "shudder to think what might have happened." Let us take our cue from him in congratulating ourselves on the pattern of progress that has given us national parks to fight over.

Let us turn now to the contention, the fighting. One has to be struck by how many visitors to Yellowstone, in the last one hundred and twenty-five years, have remarked on the way in which the contemplation of this place—its mountains and forests, its geysers and hot springs, its bears and elk—made them feel humble. I am certifiably part of that cohort. Indeed, I did not even have to *be* in Yellowstone in order to start feeling humble, modest, and reduced in vanity. I began having episodes and fits of anticipatory Yellowstone-Induced Humility months ago, back when Susan Neel first asked if I would write this essay, and this humility grew directly from the fact that Yellowstone is as complex as a social institution as it is as an ecosystem. (Honest humility would have had me simply stand up at the symposium, admit that the human history of this place was too complicated for me to figure out, and sit down. Honest humility would make for very brief conference proceedings.)

I have now logged enough of these fits of aggravated modesty to be flummoxed by one of the most puzzling phenomena of the human experience in Yellowstone: namely that some of Yellowstone's visitors have, over the decades, shown an absolute immunity to this site-based humility. I will not offer a list of names here, of those

who seem to me to be carriers of this immunity, but I suspect that employees of the park service could supply a very substantial version of this list. Members of this cohort visit Yellowstone and reconfirm their confidence and certainty. Before, during, and after a visit, they express opinions, especially opinions about how Yellowstone ought to be managed, in a style and manner that no one would ever call humility or modesty.

If I might frame this in a somewhat dehumanizing way, here is the mystery: you have this interesting and complicated species of large mammal, and when you place members of that species in Yellowstone, some of them come down with a powerful sense of their own limitations. In this first cohort, even those who are not formally religious will start speaking humbly about powers and forces that are much larger than themselves. Meanwhile another group—apparently members of the very same species—enter the same habitat, and instantly swell and puff up. Once puffed, they start proclaiming and directing and proscribing in a very remarkable way.

So what could be making the difference? I see no reason to suggest that this immunity to the humbling powers of Yellowstone is genetic; it seems more likely to be culturally acquired. What may be going on here is that this second cohort is composed of people who exercise, develop, and cultivate their self-esteem the way other people exercise, develop, and cultivate their muscles. In the privacy of their homes, they pursue the equivalent of weight lifting, but the weight they lift is their opinion of their own capacity to see the world as others *ought* to see it. Thus they are trained, primed, and ready for the challenge to self-aggrandizement posed by Yellowstone. It would take something very extraordinary—an instructive seminar on the limits of human strength, with the instruction delivered by a male bison, or the eruption of a new geyser right beneath their feet—to acquaint them with the humility many of the rest of us feel in response to considerably less stimulus.

Thus we return, to the lessons and lesions of history. Here is one unmistakable lesson of Yellowstone's history: as long as some humans retain this susceptibility to such pathological confidence, however we may redefine "progress," it is extremely unlikely that progress will ever come to mean a cessation of disagreement and an arrival at resolution, consensus, and harmony. It is one form of utopianism, to imagine a peaceable kingdom where the lion lies down with the lamb, the predators make peace with the prey. It may be an equally imaginative form of utopianism, to imagine a peaceful kingdom where the rancher lies down with the federal agency employee (curious, isn't it? it sounded so innocent when the lion and the lamb did it), and the preservationists make peace with the utilizers. Contention and Yellowstone appear to be coterminous, and it is not clear what effect that wishing it were otherwise could have on that situation.

A few years ago, I gave a keynote speech at the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies. I asked that group to choose one of two statements: 1) Animals turned out to be more difficult to manage than human beings, OR 2) Human beings turned out to be more difficult to manage than animals.

I thought that this poll would generate a fairly mixed response, but, in fact, "landslide" is too weak a term for the results: two or three hands held up on behalf of proposition #1, and about 250 held up on behalf of proposition #2.

I suppose the most cheerful way to approach this is to say that the instructional value of Yellowstone has doubled. We always knew it was a wonderful place to learn about nature, a wonderful laboratory for investigating individual species as well as an ecosystem, a place that could have been, if federal funding weren't turning so anemic, a place of endless and productive employment for natural scientists. What good news, then, to recognize that Yellowstone works just as well as a place to learn about human nature, that it is just as valuable as a laboratory for investigating human behavior, that—funding permitting—it could be as rich a subject of study for social scientists and humanists, as it is for natural scientists.

The human complexity of Yellowstone has become unmistakably one of its features of interest. Contention over the management of the park is so striking a feature that the park has developed unexpected institutional kinfolk. I cannot help thinking, for instance, that there is every good reason for the managers of Yellowstone and managers of New York's Central Park to become pen pals. Anyone who reads Roy Rosenzweig's and Betsy Blackmar's thought-provoking history of Central Park, *The Park and the People*, will have to be struck by how many of their remarks about Central Park look as if they could be picked up and relocated to Yellowstone without much modification. Here is how Rosenzweig and Blackmar summarize some of the basic questions of Central Park's history:

Who has the authority to control the park and to define "proper" behavior within it? What sort of restrictions should be set? According to what standards should the park be maintained? ...Who is permitted to participate in the public decision-making process? Who benefits from and who has the means to make uses of public spaces? Can such spaces accommodate people of different classes and cultures?¹³

It is impossible to contemplate these questions without concluding that Central Park and Yellowstone have turned out to be institutional relatives. However isolated Yellowstone once seemed from the political, cultural, and demographic pressures that, from the beginning, set the context for Central Park, that isolation proved to be remarkably temporary, and now the supporters of Yellowstone and the supporters of Central Park have more to learn from each other than, perhaps, either would have liked.

Central to the dilemmas of management has been a problem of expertise and trust. In its encounters with white Americans, Yellowstone has never been free of a credibility problem. We might call this the Jim Bridger Dilemma. The mountain man Jim Bridger had seen Yellowstone, and he talked about it a lot, but few believed what they heard from him. As Hiram Chittenden put it, "certain personal characteristics of Bridger aggravated the lack of confidence in what he said." Thus, "his reckless exaggerations won for him a reputation which he could not shake off when he wanted to." When Bridger stopped lying and tried to tell the truth, Chittenden says, in a memorable and useful phrase, "the truths he told about Yellowstone...were set down as the harmless vaporings of a mind to which truth had long been a stranger." Getting the jump on postmodernism, Chittenden saw this situation as going well beyond the clearly marked distinction between lies and truth: Bridger's "constant

repetition and enlargement of his imaginary experiences eventually” led “him to believe them true.”¹⁴

One hundred and fifty years after Jim Bridger got trapped in his own “credibility gap,” the Bridger Dilemma of Yellowstone Credibility has a whole new cast of characters. The question of whether or not to believe the tales of mountain men has now been supplanted by the question of whether or not to believe the studies of scientists.

When I was in graduate school, one of my teachers told an annoying story about a marriage counsellor, who was being observed by a graduate student. First the marriage counsellor brought in the husband of a feuding couple, and listened very sympathetically to his version of how the marriage went wrong, a version that attributed most of the problems to the wife. The marriage counsellor listened very attentively, and then said, “I think you’re absolutely right.”

Then he sent out the husband and brought in the wife, who presented an opposite version of the story, attributing most of the problems to the husband. Once again, the marriage counsellor listened very attentively, and then said, “I think you’re absolutely right.”

Then, after the wife had left, he turned to the graduate student and said, “What do you think of my technique?”

“I have to tell you,” the graduate student said, “that I think that was awful. You listened to two conflicting stories, and you said that both of them were absolutely right. It seems to me that you’ve taken a bad situation, and made it worse.”

“You know,” the marriage counsellor said, “I think you’re absolutely right.”

When one is reading about Yellowstone wildlife management, this story is never far from mind. Plenty of experts seem more than ready to answer the question, “What is happening with the elk population and the grazing resources of the northern range?” Everyone seems willing to answer. Everyone has credentials, stature, and expertise. If there is some method by which a humble Western American historian, with a pretty weak personal background in the natural sciences, is supposed to listen to these conflicting testimonies and make sense of them, in a manner more intellectually impressive than imitating the mush-headed methods of the marriage counsellor, I would certainly appreciate directions to that method.

In the most recent issue of *Yellowstone Science*, Sue Consolo-Murphy writes of these conflicts of interpretation. “Contentious issues,” she said, “...demand that we consider various scientific viewpoints.” She quotes former Superintendent Bob Barbee: “on an issue of any substance at all, the scientists will almost certainly disagree.”¹⁵ What to do? I’m sure that Consolo-Murphy is quite right in cautioning us “not to expect agreement.” But I wonder if we might, legitimately, expect a little more clarity in the presentation of the disagreements.

At the risk of a somewhat dehumanizing analogy, I think of a dog I once had, a dog of no particular wisdom, but nonetheless a dog named Socrates (his mother belonged to a man who taught classics at UCLA). We used to play a lot of ping pong in my youth, and Socrates had a pretty charming habit of standing up, placing one paw on each side of the ping pong net, and then watching the game, with his head rotating back and forth like the heads of people at a tennis match.

Well, that is what I want for myself, and for many other members of the interested public: I want to stand right at the net, and watch the volleys go back and forth, with some kind of clarity and momentum; and, having a little more understanding of the game than Socrates could muster, after the game, I want to talk to the players and find out what was involved in the contest for them.

What I want, to drop the analogy and speak more concretely, is a visit to what I have taken to calling a “Managed Contention Site.” I want to go to historic sites, and to national parks, and I want to visit places where the issues of contention are translated into accessible, spirited, and sometimes even hostile language, and laid out as clearly as possible.

I can imagine a Managed Contention Site that uses primarily prepared text: unfudged, square, no-holds-barred statements of opposing interpretations of historic issues, or in other words, interpretations that go right to the center of those Lesions of History. Should the Little Big Horn Site be a memorial to white expansionism? To the folly of excesses of confidence and shortages of caution? To the resistance of Indian people to conquest? To the universal tragedy of conflicting claims to pieces of earth?

I can also see Managed Contention Sites framed by opposing interpretations of management and policy issues. Is Yellowstone’s northern range a mess? Or is it a demonstration that the grazing of wildlife follows different processes and outcomes than the grazing of livestock? Is the problem that there are there too few willows and aspen? Too many elk? Too many experts?

Written text could carry a lot of the burden in a Managed Contention Site, but given the flagging enthusiasm of the public for reading, and given that agitated larger mammals are intrinsically interesting, I would also propose a more animate form of the MCS. Here’s how this would work: tourists are invited, though certainly not forced, to visit a three-dimensional, living demonstration of contention. Stationed around the site are people, representing different points of view, placed in flexibly designed booths arrayed, with banners and bright colors, in a manner that suggests the festivity and energy of a public fair. In the center of the plaza are a few, beach-style umbrellas, which, to give them a little dignity, we will call the Inclusive Big Umbrellas of Fair Exchange. The tourists stroll around, stopping at the booths and listening to the various points of view. If a tourist hears one person say that the elk are devastating the northern range, and then hears another person say that wild animals just have a different relationship to forage, then if the tourist wants to hear those people in a direct exchange, the tourist can summon the contenders, out from their booths, to meet under one of the Big Umbrellas of Fair Exchange.

Managed Contention Sites have two rules. The first one is that there will be no physical violence, and anyone even getting close to physical violence will leave. The second one is a little more complicated. Think back to the vice presidential debate between Dan Quayle and Al Gore in 1992, when they both talked and shouted continuously, and neither even pretended to listen to the other. This was a perfect example of what the Managed Contention Site will not support. Thus, the second rule is this: if a contender keeps interrupting and refusing to let his opponent talk, then the offending contender has to wear a Dan Quayle mask (or an Al Gore mask—

we must be bipartisan in this) until he starts behaving better.

There is one other element of preparing a Managed Contention Site, and that involves the preparation of the Contenders. I think we have to assume that the skill level here is pretty bad, and expecting people just to come in and perform this exercise well would be expecting too much. But I believe I have the solution. This idea came from following, as closely as I could, the story of the reintroduction of the wolves.¹⁶ This is a riveting story, an enormously interesting story, and one part that particularly grasped my attention was the notion of an acclimation pen. Apparently this has been a very strong determinant of reintroduction success; wolves that spend time in an acclimation pen, instead of being directly released, have a better chance of successfully adapting to their new location.

As one is reading about this important stage in the acclimating of wolves, one eventually has to ask, how come only wolves get the benefit of acclimation pens? Surely this method could benefit others.

I have some pretty ambitious ideas here; perhaps privately, I would be happy to describe my design ideas for an acclimation pen for visiting members of Congress, though I think it might be best to rename this an acclimation suite. But let me put that aside for now, and concentrate on the plan for the acclimation suites for participants at the Managed Contention Sites.

These suites should be, first of all, pleasant places, with enjoyable meals and comfortable accommodations and a nice view. The major acclimating activity, though, for the prospective contenders will consist of a deeply annoying, and extremely productive, exercise used by professional mediators, by which you can respond however you want to the other guy's statement, but before you can respond, you have to restate, clearly and accurately, what the other guy said.

This, I think, is the missing step in many of our public debates, and especially in disagreements among scientists; they seem to be disagreeing heatedly, but their listeners cannot be absolutely sure that the contenders have a clear understanding of what they are disagreeing about. But that is the rule: you stay in the Acclimation Suite until you can do this repeatedly and satisfactorily, hearing what your opponent actually said, and then stating it clearly and convincingly. Who knows, this may prove to be such a novel pleasure—and a relief—for the contender-candidates that some of them may replicate the behavior of some of Yellowstone's reintroduced wolves: you open the pen, you invite them to come out, and they choose just to stay in the pen, and have their meals delivered to them.

Managed Contention Sites, a wider use of acclimation pens: what next in the way of applications of the lessons of history? I turn down to *Strategies for the Redemption of Well-Intentioned Foolishness (SRWIF)*. What brought this to mind was thinking about the long, and peculiar, history of human beings trying to feed wild animals in this park. It is obviously a very destructive practice; it is not a good thing to habituate a wild animal to a taste for human food (whether that means food that humans eat, or humans *as* food). So I was thinking about how resolutely and persistently goofy human beings have been about feeding wildlife, and in the process of thinking about that, I realized that there is, at the core, really something quite appealing and even admirable in that impulse. The effects may be terrible, but, still, at bedrock, that

impulse to feed a hungry creature is a long ways away from depravity and sin. So why not, then, seek to redeem well-intentioned foolishness? When warning park visitors not to feed wildlife, instead of those stern and scolding signs at the park entrances, why not say to them, “Your desire to feed these animals has, at its base, an impulse to be helpful that we very much appreciate and admire; in truth, there *are* malnourished animals, and—a great deal more distressing, malnourished *people*—in this country who could very much benefit from your generous impulse. Therefore, in honor of that generosity, we have made available to you various collection boxes where you can contribute to programs that will see that those who are hungry receive food.”

Why not recognize, honor, and channel in productive directions the appealing qualities of what is otherwise just foolish and destructive behavior? Or, to put this more harshly, human beings are intrinsically and repetitively foolish creatures, and rather than lamenting this situation, the greater pay-off may lie in trying to figure out how the honorable element within the foolishness can be identified, and then rechanneled in more productive directions.

There are quite a number of ways to go with this program to Redeem Well-Intentioned Foolishness. But I want to end by returning to the theme of progress, and calling your attention to one particular, very striking, and very appealing aspect of progress in Yellowstone.

When one reads narratives written by visitors to Yellowstone in the late nineteenth century, it is hard not to feel at least a twinge of envy for their timing. The novelty, surprise, and unexpectedness of Yellowstone receive powerful testimony from those accounts. But now, a century later, there is another kind of testimony which I, in fact, find *more* powerful.

At my request, John Varley and Laura Joss sent me a range of written material produced in the park, including the park employee newsletter. I suppose some of the enjoyment of reading those newsletters came from the intrinsic interest of snooping in other people's neighborhoods. *The Yellowstone News* carries, for instance, a set of classified ads, and through those ads, you can track fashions in automotive vehicles, and you can also track some cultural references very specific to the subsociety of national park employees. “For Sale,” one reads in one example, “Custom white Kirsch mini-blinds for Mission 66 house—living room, dining room, bedrooms, kitchen. They were \$600 new, \$300 takes all.”¹⁷ Of course, even if one feels oneself enough of a sophisticate to decode the term “Mission 66 house,” one still can't quite figure out if the sellers here have decided just to go without blinds and let the world look in, or if they've come up with a better, if unspelled-out strategy for privacy.

The cultural trend that is unmistakable in park publications is this: there are now a bunch of people who have become intimate with Yellowstone. This makes quite a stunning contrast with the situation one hundred and twenty-five years ago, when surprise, astonishment, and a deep-set sense of “otherness” characterized most visitors' encounter with Yellowstone. One can see this intimacy most clearly in the writing of park employees about the geysers. The geysers all have names, and park employees write about them in a style that suggests that the geysers not only have names, they have biographies. In the *Buffalo Chip*, Mary Wilson reports on thermal activity—and human activity—at West Thumb:

In addition to the excitement surrounding the renewed activity of Twin Geysers, rangers at West Thumb are quite beside themselves with the news that there is now a predictable geyser in the neighborhood. ...[Lone Pine Geysers'] first recorded activity was in 1971, when eruptions were every 20 minutes... Since the early 1980s, eruptions have taken place every 26 to 32 hours, but over the last few months the eruption interval has shortened to 16 to 17 hours.¹⁸

While I am happy to know that Lone Pine Geysers is erupting at almost regular intervals, it is important to admit that what makes this fact important and compelling to me is that assurance from Wilson: that the “rangers are quite beside themselves with this news.”

In the park's early years, visitors took a glimpse at a geyser, stayed in the area for, at the most, a day or two, and then moved on. So here is progress: now there are people who watch these geysers year round, who observe their behavior in a steady and consistent way, and who write about these geysers as if they were neighbors. As if they were neighbors, though still very much “other,” very much part of a phenomenon that no one can confuse with human behavior.

I am struck, as well, by the way in which park employees and local environmentalists tell the life stories of wolves and bears. These wolves and bears are always scrupulously identified by number, but they are nonetheless wolves and bears who are unmistakably individuals in their habits, their histories, their adventures, their interactions with human beings, and (dare I say it) their *characters*. I understand that the numbering system has the goal of keeping park service staff properly objective and distanced, prevented from personalizing or anthropomorphizing these creatures. But the human desire to reach to the world is enormously powerful, and fully objective and detached numbering or not, the telling of the stories of these creatures has become unavoidably *intimate*.

When, in the course of the wolf reintroduction program, Number 10 got shot, leaving Number 9 widowed, with a bunch of recently born pups, it was clearly and entirely inappropriate to think of Number 9 as a “widow” and, at the same time, it was clearly and entirely impossible to *keep* from thinking of Number 9 as a widow.

And that, I think, is Progress. It is a wonderful thing, that the wolves, bears, and geysers now have biographers, and biographers who attend to the moods and actions of their subjects as closely as Boswell once attended to the moods and actions of Samuel Johnson. Scientific understanding is not compromised by caring, by neighborliness, by intimacy. While I like reading the exclamations and expressions of astonishment from travelers a century ago, I would *much* rather learn about Yellowstone, its wildlife, and its geothermal features from people who have *lived* in Yellowstone and who have known the wildlife and the geysers as neighbors. I label this state of affairs “progress,” for the pure and elemental reason that neighbors and intimates tell better stories—more instructive, more detailed, more compelling stories—than the visitors and transient observers could even glimpse.

I suppose there are those among us, in the 1990s, who would say that this intimacy is itself a sign and symptom of a tragic decline. When geysers have Boswells and wolves are widows, we are, by the judgment of some purists, indeed living in

fallen and impure times. To people with those glum feelings, I would simply say this: in the early years of Yellowstone, ignorance seemed to be the necessary precondition for wonder. The less one *knew* about the features of Yellowstone, the more astonishing and impressive the features were. But ignorance is not the only condition that permits wonder. We live in exciting times, as intimacy replaces ignorance as the foundation of Yellowstone's wonder. Wonder through intimacy is finally a much more lasting and orienting experience than wonder through ignorance. And this is one change ready to be honored with the title, progress.

Endnotes

1. Paul Schullery, *Searching for Yellowstone: Ecology and Wonder in the Last Wilderness* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1997), 57.
2. Kit Miniclier, "Yellowstone at 125," *Denver Post*, September 21, 1997.
3. Sir Rose Lambart Price, *A Summer on the Rockies* (London: Sampson, Low, Narston & Co., 1898), 197.
4. Windham Thomas Wyndham-Quin (Earl of Dunraven), *The Great Divide: Travels in the Upper Yellowstone in the Summer of 1874* (1876; rpt. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1967), 14.
5. Price, *Summer*, 125–126.
6. Hiram Martin Chittenden, *The Yellowstone National Park* (Cincinnati: Robert Clarke Co., 1903), 74.
7. *John L. Stoddard's Lectures* (Boston: Balch Brothers, 1903), Vol. X, 215.
8. Wyndham-Quin, *Divide*, 32.
9. *Ibid*, 15 and xxiii.
10. *Stoddard Lectures*, 208 and 255.
11. Chittenden, *Yellowstone*, 104 and 273.
12. Price, *Summer*, 216–217.
13. Roy Rosenzweig and Elizabeth Blackmar, *The Park and the People: A History of Central Park* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), 6 and 7.
14. Chittenden, *Yellowstone*, 47–48.
15. Sue Consolo-Murphy, "The Objective Is Objectivity," *Yellowstone Science*, Vol. 5, No. 3 (Summer 1997).
16. Thomas McNamee, *The Return of the Wolves* (New York: Henry Holt, 1997).
17. *Yellowstone News*, June 25, 1997.
18. Mary Wilson, *Buffalo Chip*, August/September 1997.

Patricia Nelson Limerick, University of Colorado, Center of the American West
Mackay, 229, 282 UCB, Boulder, CO 80309-0282



HOW THINGS WORK IN YELLOWSTONE

Paul Schullery



I WOULD LIKE TO BEGIN BY CELEBRATING what this conference means. Those of us who care about humanities issues in Yellowstone have often felt pretty lonely. We have never been able to compete with grizzly bears and geysers, and now we even lose out to microbes. In the Greatest Nature Show on Earth that runs continuously here in Yellowstone, the humanities have traditionally been stuck in a ratty little tent somewhere off the darker end of the midway. But look at all of us here. This is a show of interest, force, and usefulness that may just permanently ratchet our cause up a couple notches.

It only took this conference series four conferences to get around to the humanities, and though some people in the management agencies still giggle the first time they hear the term “historic garbage dump,” we must admit that we’ve come a long way. The conference we begin today is a great sign, even recognizing that two years from now, this conference series will probably go back to arguing over the Great Questions, like whether it’s politically correct for Yellowstone’s grazing animals to eat actual live plants. In the meantime, the agenda suggests that we’re going to do a wonderful job of portraying the incredible richness and significance of cultural issues in Greater Yellowstone.

Let me point out for the record that this conference has had some pretty notable predecessors. Not only have the humanities had a voice at any number of other conferences in the region, but also there was an earlier humanities workshop, an important one, held five years ago at Montana State University. It was entitled “The Humanities and the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem: Defining a Research Agenda.” I suspect that the research agenda we envisioned back then is in good part fulfilled by the agenda of this conference.

At that workshop, historian Dan Flores gave a memorable talk on the “Spirit of Place and the Value of Nature in the American West,” where he wondered aloud about the apparently endless “agonizing the modern American West is enduring.” He pointed out that concepts like the spirit of a place are helpful devices for, as he put it, “puzzling over the wonderfully diverse ways that women and men have both lived in and reacted to the spaces on the landscape.” I think many of us in the northern Rockies found that talk inspiring and helpful, whether we were, like Dan, newcomers to this region or were long-time puzzlers ourselves. We in the humanities struggle constantly with reconciling fairly lofty concepts like spirit of place with much earthier matters, from the vicissitudes of boom and bust economies to the every-day menus revealed by a prehistoric hearthsite.

In case any of you have gotten your hopes up, I’d better explain that by entitling my talk “How Things Work in Yellowstone,” I did not mean to suggest that I was

going to tell you. Instead, I offer that title as a justification, of sorts, for what I think we are telling the world at a conference like this. Besides all the other important things about these intellectual marathons, including the great papers, the hallway networking, and the dynamite muffins, we have a big job to do. That job is to help everybody understand just how things have worked here, and how they work here now. We especially want to get through to the people in charge—God knows *we* never are, and I'm not sure I'd even trust us to be—just how much they need us. We want them to know that without us and our often very specialized little messages about how the lofty and the earthy have blended here, they're in a whole lot worse trouble than they are when they come up short on knowledge about the grizzly bears or the bison. Grasping the population ecology of our bison is a necessary start, but it's only a start. Until you have some familiarity with the forces behind our passion for the animal, whether those forces manifest themselves in gift-shop sales, in art, or in gutbuckets, you haven't begun to understand how things work in Yellowstone.

Like most self-respecting, self-absorbed humanists, I tend to make the most sense of these big questions when I can turn them inward and bounce them off my own experience. And I must admit that I become alarmed when I realize how much experience I now have with Yellowstone, and am sometimes tempted to regard that long haul of my own life as a kind of credential, entitling me to hold forth rather more freely than I might really be entitled to. So I try to be careful. A man can live down the road from a nuclear power plant his whole life and never assume he knows the first thing about nuclear physics, but put that same man on the winter range of an elk herd and in three years he's an ecologist. In five years, he's a historian.

Twenty-five years ago, I first arrived to work here with my social conscience still pretty warm from the sixties. Though I was politically naive and socially sheltered, even I noticed that women "rangers" were dressed in embarrassingly impractical little stewardess outfits; that there was a conspicuous and almost total lack of non-white faces at my campfire programs; and that the older museum exhibits still carried some baffling and uneasy interpretive messages about Native Americans. The concessioner's well-intentioned description of Yellowstone as a "World Apart" seemed true at least in these respects: in some ways, the park, like any venerable institution, was in a constant struggle to adjust to a changing world. It still is; it still is a mixture of various imagined Wests, various imagined wildernesses, and various imagined ideals. The essentially male image of the ranger, the essentially white, middle- or upper-class image of the visitor, and the essentially subservient image of nature still played out their complex roles in all our minds. I think they still do. We might all agree that there is a spirit of Yellowstone, but as Judith Meyer's recent book by that title demonstrates, we're a long way from grasping how to accommodate that spirituality in our almost desperate attempts to do justice to this place.

So that's one way how things work in Yellowstone. Like any other human creation, it marches along, sometimes reflecting our worst just as it reaches for our best. And it does so in a bewilderingly involved process of politics, science, history, and religion. No ecological system on the planet can match the human system of Yellowstone for raw, overwhelming complexity. This is why my own questions about how Yellowstone works are so daunting to me.

Eighteen years ago, I sat around a breakfast table over at the Mammoth dining room with Mary Meagher, Nathaniel Reed, Starker Leopold, and a couple other people. Nat Reed was for some years an outstanding Assistant Secretary of the Interior for Parks, Fish, and Wildlife, and Starker Leopold was, of course, Starker Leopold. Mary, who was at that time our chief biologist, was explaining some ridiculous Washington-level snafu that was holding up the funding of the park's fisheries project. When she finished, Starker turned to Nat—neither of them held any federal office at the time—and said, “Nat, surely you know a number you can call to take care of this.” I remember at the time thinking, “So this is how it works.”

A few years later, during what former Yellowstone Superintendent Bob Barbee called the “five-year bloodbath” over the removal of the Fishing Bridge development, the National Park Service found itself politically hog-tied, unable to act as its best scientific judgment and most affirmative moral imperatives suggested it must. Someone, I don't remember who, but it was one of the park's top managers, spoke *hopefully* of the impending lawsuits from the environmental community, saying words to the effect of “This time, we're just going to have to count on our friends to make us do the right thing.” Again, a little light went on in my head, and again, my primitive notion of how things work added another convolution, another shade beyond the simple black and white of high school civics classes.

Then, at the end of the last decade, I found myself on the team of National Park Service and U.S. Forest Service staff responsible for writing the legendary *Vision Document*. I'm sure many of you remember this project and how it was universally hailed for its forward-looking and sensible approach to sustaining the values of Greater Yellowstone. The interest of our regional Congressional delegations was without bounds. Even John Sununu took time out from his busy travel schedule to comment on it.

Well, as our group of eight was working away one day in Billings, one of our team leaders told us about a briefing session she'd just held with representatives of the oil and gas industry. She explained the Vision process to them at some length, and when she finished, one of these people turned to another and said, “Should we kill it now or wait until they finish?” Again, I remember thinking, this time a little bleakly, “So *this* is how it works.”

I'm sure many of us here have war stories like these. The longer I spend here, the more I find myself marveling over the chaotic mysteries of how it works, and the exasperations of how it doesn't. I've spent most of my time as a historian trying to sort out the process by which it has or hasn't worked in Yellowstone's resource-management issues, and I've concluded what most of my manager friends recognized intuitively long ago, that there are a lot of patterns here.

Take the park's current crisis of the illegal introduction of lake trout into Yellowstone Lake, which Bob Barbee called an appalling act of environmental vandalism. When lake trout were officially discovered and a campaign was launched to educate the public about them and the threat they were, it was absolutely predictable that some portion of the public would soon respond defending the lake trout—they're good fish, and we lake trout enthusiasts are troubled to see them cast as villains. This is the reality for managers: Every opinion is out there, and will be

exercised in its turn, even if it is utterly irrelevant to the real issue. That's how it works.

The cautionary lesson here for humanities scholars is that managers, knowing that any issue they face will generate a full spectrum of positions among the public, aren't at all sure what use history or even sociology can be to them. "We already know what we're going to face. We know the spread of public opinions will be all across the map. Why do we need to do surveys? What's to study? This is just how things work in Yellowstone; always have, always will."

We can now answer that question by pointing out that the spectrum itself has a lot to teach us. One of the real milestones of wolf recovery was the completion, in 1985, of the first scholarly public survey of visitor attitudes on Yellowstone wolves, which revealed an unexpected and overwhelming national public support for wolves. The whole spectrum was still *out* there, but the bell was skewed really hard to the pro-wolf side. What a surprise, and what a nice thing to know. All of those years we conservationists had been pretty much assuming nobody cared about wolves, the public was out there overhauling thousands of years of attitudes without our help; they outran us.

When similar public surveys were done after the fires of 1988, I think many of us were surprised to discover the extent to which the public had not fallen for the apocalyptic rhetoric of the media, and were actually kind of curious about the fires, rather than just morally outraged the way some of the more intemperate commentators were. What a relief. And what a blessing that we had a way to find that out.

A few years ago, thanks to a conversation with the historian Samuel Hays, I began thinking about the longer-term patterns of our debates over Yellowstone, so I'm especially pleased to see that there are papers being presented here this week on how issues are shaped by the institutional cultures of management agencies. Of course policy analysts have been working on this question for a long time. Not only do public issues tend to sort themselves out along predictable ideological lines; they are often multi-generational, and can be tracked and predicted in ways that hadn't even occurred to me.

For example, it seems to be one of the rules of engagement in most scientific and public controversies, and certainly in Greater Yellowstone, that participants begin by undermining the credibility of their opponents. One of the most outspoken critics of the idea of natural regulation as a philosophy and a policy was recently quoted in the *Bozeman Chronicle* as announcing that "I am the only honest scientist. They have no scientists. They have people with scientific training who act as advocates." All sides tend to move to this level of rhetorical excess very quickly. We seem unsatisfied with our animosities until they have achieved a heroic scale—until we've elevated them to nearly religious issues, which, I suspect, many of them are. Most of us, especially those in the management agencies, are understandably uneasy with coming right out and acknowledging that reality, but there it is. Lurking behind all the expert scientific opinions are deep and warring value systems that most of the participants are too legally constrained, too polite, too cautious, or too blind to acknowledge.

For another example, in Yellowstone's management debates, no tactic is more

consistently successful, nor of greater potential interest to all of us truly objective humanists, than associating an opponent's opinion with a paycheck. Mark Twain once quoted an old man he knew, a former slave, as saying that "You tell me where a man gets his cornpone, and I'll tell you what his 'pinions is." The Cornpone Gambit is in constant use in our issues, most commonly in the claim that such and such a researcher or other position taker cannot be trusted because he received some of his support from the feds.

But the cornpone gambit can as easily be applied to any position holder in any of our debates. It's no coincidence that the people opposed to wolves are agricultural, either by profession or by inclination, or that western land-grant colleges with strong ag departments are more likely to be sources of criticism of natural regulation policy, while more distant universities with different departmental emphasis—which is to say different institutional cultures—have provided many of the researchers who think natural regulation is our best hope.

Moving to another element of Greater Yellowstone's culture of controversy, it's certainly no accident that criticisms of management agencies—or of universities, for that matter—get a lot more attention in the regional media than do compliments or even equivocations. Let me apply the cornpone gambit to the media. Last year, when regional congressional delegations insisted that the General Accounting Office investigate the National Park Service's management policies on the northern range, it was probably predictable that if the GAO had, as the delegations hoped, found great evidence of misconduct and bad management, these revelations would saturate the headlines, but that if they didn't, the whole thing would be pretty much ignored. Sure enough, when the GAO went only so far as to point out that there was indeed a legitimate scientific controversy going on here, regional journalists enthusiastically ignored the report. The GAO report, though vindication of a genuine and important scientific debate, was without question a major milestone in the northern range controversy, but because no witches were burned, it had no future as a cornpone-generating headline.

Of course being an objective humanities scholar rather than a mere scientist or bureaucrat, I realize that it wasn't the greed associated with scandal-mongering headlines that caused the media to ignore this important story. I prefer to give them the benefit of the doubt and assume that the media, like the rest of us, is sometimes just incompetent.

We all, whoever our employer, whatever value system we honor, can be seen cynically, as bowing to the most sinister stereotype of our employer's needs; this is a very comforting way to see one's opponents. And it does comfort a lot of us, and does sell a lot of newspapers, but it also sells short what is really going on here, which is much more interesting than a world view in which half the people are sold souls and Darth Vaders.

It makes a lot more sense, and gives more hope for progress, if we at least see controversy as a great battle over values systems or paradigms. A few weeks ago, Montana Senator Conrad Burns wrote to Superintendent Mike Finley and suggested that Greater Yellowstone submit to a Coordinated Resource Management review by the Society of Range Management. Finley responded, in part, by saying that "Our

skeptical friends tell us that ‘putting the Society for Range Management in charge of overseeing range management in Yellowstone would be like putting the Fund for Animals in charge of writing Montana’s hunting regulations.’”

Mike was going against traditional fashions here, and speaking more openly about competing value systems. People like Mike could use our help in this conversation. All the participants in Greater Yellowstone’s issues are people who, for reasons of temperament and personal interest and disposition and religion and a hundred other things from biochemical imbalances to harsh potty training, are inclined to certain values systems and therefore are attracted to certain employers, whether agency, university department, organization, foundation, or corporation. No doubt a few of us are dishonest. There is always the scumbag factor. There is always the crackpot factor. But no doubt most of us are honest and are trying as hard as we know how. No doubt most of us sincerely believe science is on our side. But the underlying values systems that lead us to our preferred view of things aren’t getting near enough attention. It is in areas like this that the humanities disciplines can make the most difference.

We are fascinated, rightly so, with the ethnography of native Americans in Greater Yellowstone; we want to understand their relationship with this place. But we tend to consider our own, current feelings and lifeways as irrelevant to scholarship, not measuring up to earlier residents and their descendants. So perhaps the first question we should ask ourselves, is why do we sell our own belief systems, legends, and folklore so short? After all, these things are driving today’s management of these lands, more so than all the laws, policies, and litigation ever will.

Take folklore. Every day you can watch folklore happen here; it would be a great place to track the origin of what are by most definitions authentic folk tales. We saw it taking place within days of the release of the first wolves in 1995. The media happily quoted misinformed ranchers who asserted that the feds had promised that the wolves would not leave the park. No fed ever said that; even a cursory reading of the rule would make it clear the wolves were expected and intended to move far. But I can almost guarantee you that fifty years from now, aging ranchers will assure their grandchildren that the park service lied about keeping wolves in the park. This folk tale will enter our regional lore, to join such other charming legends as the secret ranger gold mine known to exist near Mammoth, and the huge backcountry pits where evil rangers buried hundreds of executed bears back in the 1970s.

Why aren’t we studying all of this? Our universal participation in this sort of mythologizing can be seen as a hopeless source of exasperation, but it also should be recognized and even celebrated for its central role in the future of Greater Yellowstone’s cultural fabric. This process, this part of how things work in Yellowstone, provides us with one of our finest opportunities to learn more about ourselves and how, as Dan Flores put it, we have lived in and reacted to the landscape. Actual events, gossip, scientific findings, political agendas, religious convictions, and value-charged mythology mix daily here, and place us all in what writer J. R. R. Tolkien has so poetically called the “Cauldron of Story.” For what we are dealing with here is in fact Story at its best, with all the richness and exhilarating human drama of any great saga.

Intellectually, I find all this social chaos exhilarating for its variability. But on the other hand, I have to admit that too much of the time these days, I don't find it particularly encouraging. Some days I find myself thinking that if this is all the better it gets, and if all that those of us who are immersed in Greater Yellowstone's controversies have to look forward to is irresolvability borne of ignorance and contention—that is, if all that I and the people I disagree with have to look forward to is another generation of writing gradually better books at each other, then maybe I ought to give someone else my spot in the cauldron and just go play rhythm guitar in a good western band like I always wanted to. After all, the way it works is that we're always going to get pretty much the Yellowstone we deserve, and sometimes we don't seem to deserve all that much.

But then something comes along and it all gets interesting again. Ann Johnson or Ken Cannon will stop by with some amazing new chapter in Yellowstone's fabulous archeological mystery story, or I'll read some new article on the amazing reach of early Yellowstone post cards in American society.

Or I'll find myself wondering about something new, some element of the Yellowstone Cauldron I hadn't given any thought—like how come Yellowstone inspires so much art, but so little music? Why is it that for every thousand beautiful new paintings, we only get one new composition of the quality of Stewart Weber's "Gallatin Jig," or Beth Mackintosh's "Grizzlies Walking Upright?"

Lee Whittlesey recently pointed out to me that in the 1880s, when the first large hotel was built in Yellowstone, dozens of black people suddenly materialized on the scene to work there, anonymous figures in the background of historic photographs we admire without noticing them. How did that happen? Where did these people come from, and what did *they* make of this place? And who else haven't we noticed?

Or wouldn't it be interesting to take Frank Sulloway's controversial new theories on the importance of birth order in establishing personality, and apply them to Yellowstone? What would an exercise like this tell us about the historical community here, or about participants in today's controversies, or about our Congressional delegations?

This process of discovery, and of dismay over all the things I seem to have missed, is how Yellowstone works for me. One morning, I find myself being interviewed about the early years of the grizzly bear controversy, and suddenly realize that back then, when I was a young ranger-naturalist dutifully telling bear stories to park visitors, this reporter who is asking me about it wasn't even born yet. In that moment, I catch a glimpse of my own life as so much of it accelerates into the past and I too become a part of the story. We all drift into the mix, and Yellowstone rolls on.

Micah Morrison referred to those of us who live here and take this place so personally as the Yellowstone Nation. I find myself wondering how our successors will view the Yellowstone Nation, the human Yellowstone. A hundred years from now, if we've saved enough of Greater Yellowstone to justify the study, I assume there will be a bunch of poor overworked schmucks in graduate departments—I'm speaking here as an ex-schmuck—cranking out scholarly analyses of us just as we now study our past. When they come to this year's bison management uproar, they will have an abundance of archives: statistical summaries, newspaper clippings, and tons

of documents to analyze. But will they have any way of knowing what the human Yellowstone of 1997 was really like? Will the statistics and documents and all of that stuff give them an authentic portrait of what a stunned human Yellowstone this has been, full of people feeling betrayed by circumstances into the slaughter of the very animals and values we treasure, and then left heartsick by a relentless series of personal tragedies that were simply beyond the comprehension of any reasoning community? How can future students possibly make sense of what has happened here this year if they don't know these things? How can we make sense of anything that is happening here now if we don't know these same things about our own past?

And so whenever I'm tempted to disengage entirely from the Yellowstone wars, or even renounce my citizenship in the Yellowstone Nation, I come around to the realization that that's *not* how it works in Yellowstone. My all-time favorite Republican and one of the great toilers over the Yellowstone Cauldron of Story was Theodore Roosevelt, who confronted this dilemma of faltering commitment in his typically direct fashion. He had just read H. G. Wells's pessimistic classic, *The Time Machine*, which predicted the failure and doom of all human endeavor. Roosevelt was not discouraged by the prospect. He said, "Suppose, after all, that should prove to be right.... *That doesn't matter now*. The effort's real. It's worth going on with.... It's worth it—even then." I admire that spirit, that hopefulness that has nothing to do with whether or not there is any reason to have hope.

And on those days when my little corner of the Yellowstone Nation seems pretty oppressive, when the flat-earthers, book-burners, and witch-hunters are in full cry, and when even that overwhelming majority of people who I think of as reasonable are getting pretty shrill, and when I'm getting wound up right along with the rest of them, I try to do two things. First, I remind myself that I'm among the most fortunate few, who get to witness the cauldron from the inside, and that I can already look back with great academic interest on a dozen similar episodes I've been through that were just like this one that is still too close for such calm reflection. Second, as soon as I can I try to get out there on that great restorative landscape and remind myself why all of us here care so much in the first place.

Paul Schullery, National Park Service, Yellowstone Center for Resources, P.O. Box 168, Yellowstone Park, WY 82190



A. Starker Leopold Lecture

CONSENSUS AND THE CAMEL'S NOSE:
AN INQUIRY INTO HOW FAR WE CAN GO
BEFORE THE BEAST OCCUPIES THE
ENTIRE TENT

T. H. Watkins



IT'S A HIGH HONOR to be given the opportunity to talk to you tonight on the occasion of one of the happiest and longest lasting birthdays in American history. To tell the truth I see no reason why March 1, the date of the signing of the Yellowstone Park Act should not be declared a national holiday. We need a good holiday in the calendar about then—President's Day doesn't quite cut it. And we need it particularly out here, where, they tell me, as the new kid on the block, a new neighbor of the park, I can expect to have rather a lot of snow dumped on me.

I'm equally honored to be speaking to you under the escutcheon of that great conservationist A. Starker Leopold. There's an old saying, "the worst thing that can befall an ordinary man was to have had an extraordinary father." Starker Leopold escaped the curse of being Aldo Leopold's son by becoming an extraordinary man himself. Indeed all of the Leopold children stepped out from their father's magnificent light to cast a glow of their own. Starker's work as chairman of the committee of scientists that produced the monumental report in 1963, earned him a seat at the Immortality Table in the conservation community. And there are few people here in the Yellowstone Park community, I'll bet, who are not intimately, even painfully aware of all the plain, hard, and sometimes controversial work that is involved in the Leopold Committee's principal recommendation that the National Park Service "recognize the enormous complexity of ecologic communities and the diversity of management procedures required to preserve them." Now there's a mandate to be reckoned with.

Yours has been an incredibly demanding and too often under-appreciated and thankless crusade that has brought you too many artillery attacks from dark corners of the land and much too much glib criticism by ersatz ecologists. And even though I reserve the right to stand up on my hind legs and holler at you myself from time to time, as I used to do when I was a dreaded professional environmentalist with the Wilderness Society, I nevertheless salute you.

Okay, now brace yourselves. I was going to have my beard trimmed for this occasion, but I felt a jeremiad coming on and thought I might as well look the part. I should say that the views expressed above, and from now on, are entirely my own and do not necessarily represent those of the state of Montana, Montana State University,

the county of Gallatin, the city of Bozeman, the people of my neighborhood, the family of Wallace Stegner, any known environmental group, extremist or otherwise, any recognized religious organization, Phi Beta Kappa, the Society of American Journalists and Authors, the National Cattleman's Association, the Western History Association, or the U.S. Chambers of Commerce. That lets just about everybody off the hook except my wife, Joan, who's stuck with me.

More than ten years ago I came across a beautifully incised petroglyph of Kokopelli the mythical Anasazi/Hopi flute player in an obscure canyon in southern Utah. It was on a large boulder with a few other less well-crafted petroglyphs. I photographed the Kokopelli and for years the picture hung over my desk. I even made a copy for Tony Hillerman as a tribute to his wonderful novel, *A Thief of Time*, in which the old flute player is featured. I built whole essays around that image, going on at some length about what it all might mean in spiritual terms, what it could tell us of an old relationship between human beings and the natural world and even gave it the gross luminosity of print in my book on southern Utah, *Stone Time*. Well, one of these days I will have to write Tony Hillerman and tell him he might want to toss the photograph; I tossed my copy. A couple of years ago I learned that the numinous Kokopelli image actually had been done in 1976 or thereabouts, not six or seven hundred years ago. The other petroglyphs were genuine, the artist said in an anonymous memo he sent around to a few friends after one of my articles appeared in print. But it was he who had done the Kokopelli, he said, pecking it out himself with a rock. It was, he said, a harmless prank. Me, I think it was plain vandalism, hardly different in character from spray painting a Renoir.

Whether he meant to or not, what the artist had done was an act of mockery; not of people like me, with our trembling literary pretensions, which perhaps deserve to be mocked, but of a people long since vanished, people who had spent enough time in those canyons to have wanted to give their presence there substance and meaning. It was an incredibly beautiful spot; perhaps to those people it also was sacred.

I think about that act of vandalism and I think about the casual destruction by parties unknown of the Eye of the Needle Arch above the Missouri River in Montana last Memorial Day weekend. This was an important place too. Lewis and Clark camped across the river from the arch and it had been one of the most popular natural sites along this beautiful stretch of the Missouri for years. It might not have been holy, but it certainly was worthy of simple respect. The Bureau of Land Management spent quite a lot of time discussing the idea of rebuilding the arch. On one level this offended me because I would rather see the BLM spending that kind of time and energy reclaiming more of the grasslands and riparian areas it has allowed to be hammered by livestock. On another level I was displeased by the very notion of trying to reconstruct the arch, just as I would be if the counterfeit Kokopelli in southern Utah were sandblasted away and we pretended that time had never been corruptive in that fine and holy place.

It now appears that a kind of memorial to the vandalized arch will be erected across the river instead. I kind of like that idea but think we should go even further. Put a fence around the remnants of the arch. Put up a big sign that could be read from Lewis and Clark's old campsite: "this natural phenomenon, which took several

million years of geological and erosional processes to create, was destroyed in the blink of an eye by human morons Memorial Day 1997.”

Put a fence around my Anasazi site too, and while we're at it, why not find a good-sized clear cut alongside a road somewhere in, say, Washington State's Olympic National Forest, and have the forest service offer guided tours of the place, showing the eroded soil, the spindly re-growth, the mutilated corpse of a once healthy forest. And hey, what about all those shiny, unexploded air force bombs you see sticking out of the desert at Cabeza Prieta National Wildlife Refuge in Arizona. Wouldn't one of those make a nifty monument?

We commemorate the mindless cruelties Americans have inflicted on one another at places like Andersonville Prison, Georgia, where Civil War soldiers died like worms in the sun, or the Manzanar Relocation Camp in California where during World War II Japanese-Americans learned that the term “guilt by association” had implications they never dreamed of. The theory is that if we call attention to these acts of barbarity perhaps we will never repeat them. Should we do anything less when we have violated the world that time has given us?

I begin with this angry little homily, on the theory that it may help to remind us that there are still Visigoths in the land. But not all of them are just would-be artists ready to profane an ancient site for the sake of an elaborate joke, or holiday drunks out to tear down the work of eons in order to work off an overdose of testosterone. A lot of Visigoths have gone to college and taken sensitivity training, and achieved positions of power. But the Visigothian impulse has only been muted, not eliminated. And we are a long way from paradise preserved when there are respectable people around who can still inspire an environmentalist spin on the old Woody Guthrie line, “some rob you with a six gun, some with a fountain pen.”

For the most part, however, these people can be watched, their actions monitored and sometimes rebuffed by the wielding of our own environmentalist fountain pens. But I think there may be a more subtle danger at work in the West today, one that would cause us to doubt our own past, begin to question the importance of the work that has brought us this far, and wonder if the values that have informed and inspired the development of almost all federal environmental law for nearly a century, from the Forest Management Act of 1897 to the California Desert Protection Act of 1994, are still valid.

As I see it, the situation today can be described in a few basic questions: Should the federal government still have the broad legal authority to manage and protect the 623 million acres of national lands—the parks, forests, refuges, and BLM lands—that are the common property of the people of the United States? Haven't these agencies too often abused their power? Haven't they fallen into the hands of ivory tower scientists and social theorists who care more for critters than for people? And isn't it time now for these lands to become the domain not of the general public but of those people who live closest to them and depend on them most directly? Do federal environmental laws stifle progress, cripple free enterprise, subvert local economies, cost jobs, cast a pall on the future? Should economic considerations take precedence over ecological determinations when the fate of any given parcel of land or species population is on the table? And finally, one question that brings a kind

of ironic wrinkle to the age-old tension between the resident West and the federal government, do national environmental organizations like the Wilderness Society, the Sierra Club, the National Wildlife Federation, and the National Audubon Society, based in Washington and committed to the importance of federal law and their own powerful positions in the world, ride roughshod over local conservation groups whose awareness of the land's true needs gives them a greater moral authority in deciding what should be done about managing them?

There won't be time tonight to address each of these questions individually, but I hope I can shed some light, or at least some opinion, on a few of them. First of all, out of this traditional welter of contention, some of it attended by either the threat of violence or real violence, as in the Carson City bombings of 1995, has arisen a new movement, one based on the ideal of community and committed to the notion that there are few important issues that cannot be resolved by the act of getting all parties together and talking the problem out. Come, let us reason together, as Lyndon Johnson used to say, and people are.

Conflict resolution and coalition building over the question of public land use and community economic planning is a growth industry. Groups of local and national environmentalists, government officials, loggers, ranchers, and even urban boomers and boosters, have been sitting down together at big tables in places like Missoula, Montana, to talk about grizzly bear recovery; or Ashton, Idaho, to discuss the future of the Henrys Fork watershed; or Montezuma County of Colorado to influence management policy in San Juan National Forest; or Grays Harbor County in Washington to come up with economic alternatives to replace timber production once the timber was gone; or Quincy, California, to hammer out a management plan for Plumas and Tahoe national forests that will both protect habitat and keep the timber economy going.

No reasonable human being could do anything but applaud the impulse behind these efforts and dozens more like them. Ever since John Muir and the infant Sierra Club took on the city of San Francisco over the question of building a dam in Yosemite National Park at the turn of the century, and lost, the American conservation movement has been characterized by what might be called a barricade mentality. The battles have been necessary, even inevitable. And admittedly there is something almost perversely appealing in the idea of absolute good (Us) being locked in sweaty combat with absolute evil (Them). The conflict gives birth to a good deal of satisfactory passion and the kind of rhetoric that glows in the dark.

But over the long haul, confrontation is exhausting of human beings and of resources. And if the great middle ground of discussion can overcome the weight of history and the monstrous obstacles of human cussedness to truly reach rational consensus on important issues like wolf recovery, grizzly reintroduction, saving what little is left of salmon populations in the Pacific Northwest, reducing the loss of old growth forest, protecting wetlands and grasslands, preserving adequate reserves of wilderness, reforming the general mining law of 1872, and helping western towns find a way through the troubling maze of the economic future, then it will have gone a long way toward achieving a new way of looking at the land and the place of human communities in it.

At the same time, there are pitfalls to be aware of. Many people, for example, questioned the recent management plan developed by California's Quincy Library Group with Tahoe and Plumas national forests. The group's plan, currently in the process of being codified into law by Congress, was no sooner announced than it brought forth a blast of criticism, most of it from environmentalists outside the Quincy Library Group. The objections are too detailed to go into here, and I am not expert enough to address most of them intelligently anyway. But I will say this. There is much to be feared in the fact that the plan as it now stands would validate the power of a single group in a single local community to pretty much dictate how one-third of the public forest land in the Sierra Nevada would be managed from now on. This is not, I would submit, an idea whose time has come.

Maybe it will some day when the West has transformed itself and become, as Wallace Stegner once hoped it would, a society to match its scenery. He also said that the West is the native home of hope. Such an idea is by no means an impossible notion. Indeed, I have said before and I will say again, that I think the future of conservation in the West is regional, that someday organizations like the Greater Yellowstone Coalition will have acquired an even more deeply functional symbiosis with the large national conservation organizations than they already enjoy. That all federal agencies everywhere will have abandoned their territorial and budgetary squabbles, and begun working together and with citizen groups to manage their lands as ecological units, and that decades of educational effort from the grade school level up through college will have produced a conservation ethic shared by all of the West's classes and communities, rural and urban, social and political.

But that utopian ideal, however possible I still believe it to be, is not with us yet. And the national lands are too important a legacy to see their fate put in the hands of the few, however enlightened they earnestly believe themselves to be. For one thing, as Michael McCloskey, an old Sierra Clubber and the point man in the 1968 battle to create Redwood National Park, has warned, local control is especially vulnerable to subversion by the development-minded. "Many community activists like these proposals," McCloskey has written. "They see them as empowering. Many academics praise them too. And industry likes them, but for reasons that can be all too self-serving," McCloskey worries. "Industries," he notes, "prefer dealing with community representatives to having to duel with the EPA experts at the national level or with representatives of national environmental groups. One company spokesman recently told an audience: 'I don't want bureaucrats telling me how to run my business; I would far prefer to take my chances with people from the community.'" "And why shouldn't he?" McCloskey asks. "Industry thinks its odds are better in those forums. It believes it can dominate them over time and relieve itself of the burden of tough national rules. It has ways to generate pressures in communities where it is strong, which it doesn't have at the national level."

As for federal agencies no longer being the proper stewards of the public lands of the West, let me offer a parable. I come from Washington, D.C., where I spent the last 16 years of my life. There are numerous public monuments, museums, and parks in the district, virtually all of them under the management of the National Park Service or the Smithsonian Institution, since these lands and monuments are owned

by the federal government, which is to say all of the people of the United States.

But what about the citizens of Washington, D.C.? They are the people who live most closely with these federal units, they are the ones whose economy and jobs are largely dependent upon the swarms of tourists who come to visit a resource to be mined as assiduously as Crown Butte has just mined the U.S. Treasury. That being the case, why shouldn't the government of the District of Columbia be put in charge of these monuments, museums, and parks? Why shouldn't the city government be allowed to determine how these units are to be managed, how much development should be allowed for parking lots and restrooms and motels and concessionaire stands and roads and signs, how much money should be charged for admission, how budgets are allocated, how staffs are chosen and administered?

Let us now share a moment of appalled silence.

Now I'm not going to claim that the government of any city, county, or even state in the West is as screwed up as the city government of Washington, D.C. I probably would be cut up into small pieces and fed to the wolves if I did. But I would argue that it makes no more sense to think of the national capital park system or the National Gallery of Art being placed in the hands of the city of Washington, than it does to give Kane and Garfield counties in Utah, for instance, control over how Grand Staircase Escalante National Monument is to be developed and managed. And believe me, both counties would love the opportunity.

Whatever the flaws of federal management, and no one who has ever read *Wilderness* magazine will ever have any doubt that I think they have been enormous from time to time, these lands belong to the nation, and it is the national government that should keep them in the manner to which they damn well should have become accustomed. And any time consensus brings forth any other sort of outcome, I think it may be time to get up and leave the table. Come, let us reason apart.

There is another pitfall I think it is important to watch out for in the dream of consensus, and that is its tendency, as is usual in human bureaucratic events, to let the seductions of process, with its smoothly fashioned structures, its beguilingly professional-sounding jargon, its confidence in the attractions of good fellowship, its belief in the inherent virtues of democratic consensus, obscure some important truths, and cause us to lose sight of why it was we came to the table in the first place.

This was brought home to me most forcefully a few months ago, when I read an article on the current wilderness fight in Utah in the second issue of the *Chronicle of Community*, the excellent new publication being produced by the Northern Lights Institute. The article chided the Utah Wilderness Coalition, a gathering of national, regional, and local environmental groups, businesses, educational institutions, and other organizations and individuals devoted to the preservation of wilderness in the state. The coalition's offense, the author maintained, was that its members, as he put it, took their marbles and went home from the table of discussion in the face of a political compromise that would have established just three million acres of wilderness. After all, he said, the three million acres that Representative Karen Shepherd and others would have been willing to accept was three times as much wilderness as the BLM originally proposed.

Well, yes it was. But it also was only a little over half what the Utah Wilderness

Coalition had determined was desirable—5.7 million acres. That figure of 5.7 million acres was no casual number thrown out as a kind of bargaining chip. It was a figure that years of on-the-ground investigation by citizen volunteers all over the state had demonstrated to be the minimum required to have an established and ecologically representative sampling of wilderness in Utah. The figure came to only 26 percent of the total of 22 million acres of BLM land in the state, it should be remembered. And virtually every square foot of what was left would have remained open to development of one kind or another.

I wrote in a letter to the editor following the article's publication: "Perhaps a compromise of the sacrificed 2.7 million acres of potential wilderness put the coalition members in mind of something another old Sierra Clubber, Daniel B. Luten, said almost 30 years ago. 'Whenever the subject of compromise comes up in a conservation discussion,' he wrote, 'beauty does all the compromising. Splitting the difference between beauty and utility, again and again, ultimately will leave nature next to nothing. A half of a half of a half of a half is a sixteenth. So long as that was the kind of compromise brought to the table,' Luten despaired, 'the cause of the American landscape is a losing battle, to be fought from barricade to barricade, but always backward. When will the tide turn?'"

When indeed, I asked in the letter, and I ask it still. For my heart remains sick at the idea that so many people apparently are willing to think of wilderness areas as little more than bargaining chips to be quibbled over, as if they were agenda items in a labor negotiation. You'll have to forgive a little personal passion here. I know the country of southern Utah pretty well, and have been involved at one level or another in the wilderness fight there for more than ten years. And I am here to tell you that those lands are not chits in the socio-political game. They are real. The beauty they possess is real. The diversity of landscape and biology they nurture are real. And if we let 2.7 million acres of them be sacrificed for the sake of political expedience, or the need to get things settled once and for all, or to get someone's career back on track, or simply in obedience to the holy grail of consensus, the loss will be real too, and irreversible.

I don't know the millions of acres of potential wilderness that remain unprotected in Montana, Idaho, Colorado, Wyoming, Oregon, Nevada, New Mexico, and Alaska, anywhere near as well as I do the wilderness of Utah. But I do know some of those acres, and I know too that in these states as in Utah there are levels of compromise that cannot be accepted if we are to take our duty to the land seriously, no matter how unreasonable that kind of stubbornness may appear to be. A half of a half of a half of a half, damn it all, is still a sixteenth.

I hope you will forgive me yet again if I insist then that our duty to the land still is utterly dependent on wilderness preservation. Until we come up with something that will better maintain the integrity of the land and its species, we had better keep our eyes on the wilderness prize. This kind of simple-minded insistence is not an especially popular attitude in the West these days, if it ever was, even among some academics, the same kinds of people, though not the same individuals, who were foot soldiers in the old conservation wars. They've been thinking a lot lately, these folk, and in the process of thinking have begun to wonder out loud whether the sixty

year commitment to the wilderness idea as a political expression has not blinded us to some essential truths, among them the fact that the wilderness idea is very precisely just that: an idea, an artifact, created not by what is in nature but by what we persuade ourselves to see in nature, a kind of romanticism that idealizes wild places and distorts ecological reality. Wilderness, these voices say, is but a social construct we have inflicted on a helpless nature.

One of the central themes of wilderness preservation, they contend, is based on the false premise that human beings somehow exist apart from nature and especially apart from those enclaves, which we have dubbed wilderness, areas perceived to be in a lyrically pristine state of pure nature. In the first place, they remind us, there was virtually no time in human or even geological history when any major part of this continent was ever truly pristine. Certainly not at that moment when it was first encountered by the European invaders. There were after all, somewhere between ten and twenty million Native American people representing scores of individual cultures in residence at the beginning of the seventeenth century, and human beings had wandered the landscape for thousands of years even before that.

They did not tiptoe through the tulips of the wilderness, all these people. They used nature, altered nature, moved things around, built things up, tore things down. They used fire to change the landscape to their advantage, grafted one plant species onto another in order to produce something they could cultivate and eat, incised complicated networks of trails to the land. In the Mississippi River Valley they built huge urban complexes. In the canyons of the southwest they constructed elaborate and quite sophisticated irrigation projects.

And even before human time, critics of preservation point out, nature itself hardly functioned in the kind of vacuum that the term "pristine" might suggest. Ecosystems were once viewed as static, closed entities, that left alone would achieve a perfect balance of relationships between species and the physical laws that govern them. Not so, ecologists now say. Ecosystems are dynamic, forever changing, spitting out some species, welcoming others in, shifting about the landscape itself with the winds of climate change and the imperatives of survival, a wondrous evolutionary sarabande whose destination we can only guess at. Designating wilderness areas on the theory that we are protecting some unsullied relic of primeval America, then, is both illogical and a little crazy. What we are doing with wilderness designation is protecting an idea, not a place.

To which a committed former professional environmentalist like me is liable to respond, okay. What irritates me about this charge probably more than anything else is the assumption that the people who conceived and wrote and won the passage of the Wilderness Act were a bunch of ecological numbskulls, and that today's movement is mindlessly regurgitating old misconceptions. But Aldo Leopold and Olaus Murie and Howard Zahniser knew perfectly well that there was then, and there is not now much of anything left on this continent that could be described as a place where the hand of man has never set foot, to use the sardonic phrasing of David Brower. And even back in the dark ages of the 1960s, scientists like Murie had long since figured out that the ecological systems represented by wilderness were by no means static, natural enclaves that had remained pretty much the same for whole

geological epochs. This tender belief may still linger among a few clots of ignorant New Age enthusiasts and/or Generation X-ers, many of whom I'm sorry to say, may indeed style themselves professional environmentalists.

But the science that underlies most of the wilderness preservation movement knows perfectly well that natural systems are anything but static. Similarly, the movement has for some time understood, that from the cornfields of prehistoric times to the clear cuts of the modern era, human beings have left the mark of their ambitions on the land.

The fact is the Wilderness Act of 1964 doesn't say anything about "pristine" or declare that human beings are separate from nature or insist that wilderness areas are supposed to be ecological museum pieces. What it does say is this: "a wilderness, in contrast to those areas where man and his own works dominate the landscape, is hereby recognized as an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammelled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain." Nature dominates, human beings touch but do not trammel, which is to say do not bind up in the net of exploitation. Mere traces of past human activity should not be enough to prevent the designation of any given wilderness if scientific, ecological, and spiritual reasons for its preservation outweigh the impediment of human contact.

That was precisely the rationale behind the Eastern Wilderness Act of 1975, an addendum to the 1964 Act that recognized the importance of preserving many natural areas in the American East that had in fact been worked over by human beings to a fare-thee-well at one time or another, but had since recovered much of their original complexity and natural values.

Consider too the fact that in the West one of the arguments the preservation movement puts forth for the designation of many areas, is that they harbor archeological resources of great value to the nation, and in many places of great sacred value to Native Americans. Preservationists also are likely to point out that the first peoples of America and their Indian descendents, however broadly scattered across the landscape and no matter how ingenious, accomplished very little in the way of significant environmental change over several millennia, when compared to almost anything the European invaders managed to do in a few hundred years.

Go down to southern Utah, preservationists might say, as I might say, and walk around in some of the 5.7 million acres that are proposed for preservation and then tell them that wilderness designation is little more than a relic of nineteenth-century romanticism. People have lived here before and you will see the evidence of their lives all around you. And if you want to be truly depressed you can even take a look at some of what modern humans have done there with their roads and their cattle and their isolated dreams of striking it rich. But the beauty, isolation, natural integrity, and species diversity that should be expected of any designated wilderness area can still be found there and should be preserved from the injury we modern folk, with our vastly superior hammers of development, can still inflict. Wilderness is not just an idea, it is a place and we know its name. And if its protection is the result of a social construct, then I say hurray for social constructs, let's have more of them.

At the same time these modern critics of the preservation movement have raised a point well worth thinking about. And it is with this point that I would like to leave

you tonight. Because it is on this point that I think the trend toward the table of consensus is a truly positive phenomenon.

It is becoming increasingly clear that in our zeal to preserve wilderness we must be careful not to relegate all other nature to a kind of second-class citizenship. When investing so much of our philosophical, emotional and political energy in the preservation of wild landscapes, however necessary such efforts are, we should not grow careless about the rest of the world in which we must, after all, live and get a living.

William Cronon, one of the new lights of the new wilderness criticism, has summed up what might be described as the perils of smugness quite succinctly in his now famous essay, "The Trouble with Wilderness": "To the extent that we live in an urban-industrial civilization," he writes, "but at the same time pretend to ourselves that our *real* home is in the wilderness, to just that extent we give ourselves permission to evade responsibility for the lives we actually lead. We inhabit civilization while holding some part of ourselves—what we imagine to be the most precious part—aloof from its entanglements. We work our nine-to-five jobs in its institutions, we eat its food, we drive its cars (not least to reach the wilderness), we benefit from the intricate and all too invisible networks with which it shelters us, all the while pretending that these things are not an essential part of who we are. By imagining that our true home is in the wilderness, we forgive ourselves the homes we actually inhabit."

I would argue, as would many in this room I think, that accepting the wilderness as the essential home of the human spirit does not necessarily bring with it a careless attitude for the world where we spend most of our lives. Nevertheless, Cronon's point is well taken. Too often we are careless, forgetting that our connection to the natural world begins at the threshold of every home and continues into the neighborhood, the town, the state, and the region of wherever it is that we live. We have no reason to be proud of what we have corrupted among all those connections. And if we lose our commitment to the immediate world in a dream of wilderness, we will bring it all down to ruin, wilderness and non-wilderness alike.

It is this single hard lesson, I think, that conservationists must learn in their bones and then bring to the table of discussion. Just like natural systems whose interdependent parts function in a dynamic of change, the arguments for wilderness preservation also must evolve or die. It is no longer enough to identify a landscape, draw a line around it, add it to the national wilderness preservation system, then rest on our laurels, satisfied that we have just saved one more piece of the natural world forever. The brutal fact is that wilderness areas so conceived, even if we monitor their use and management diligently, cannot in the long run survive the pressures of the world all around them. They cannot function forever as islands in a sea of ever-increasing development and degradation, isolated natural systems cut off from one another so completely they might as well be atolls scattered across the boundless void of the Pacific.

And then we must turn the argument on its head and make it clear with all the evidence at our command that just bio-regions and all the lives they hold, cannot themselves prosper, socially, economically, or spiritually without the wilderness that

lies at their heart. Wilderness enclaves must no longer be seen as something outside the real world of American life, whether by preservationists, or industrialists, or academics. Rather they must be accepted as the essential core of regional identity seeking to pursue a truly sustainable dynamic between what is demanded of the land and what it can give, between what human beings strive for and what they cannot have without putting the whole in peril.

Such a balance can only be achieved if all the participants are willing to accept its protocols, its limitations, and its possibilities. And that agreement can only be achieved through precisely the meeting of minds that so many people and organizations are trying to engineer all over the West. There is not going to be any easy fix. And I would urge you to deeply suspect agreements reached too soon or with too much delight. It is too likely that someone in the room will have ended up a whole lot more happy than the rest.

But if it is bound to take hard work and harder time, if we can bring it off I can think of no greater validation of what Aldo Leopold called the community concept in his famous essay on the land ethic in *A Sand County Almanac*. "All ethics so far evolved," he wrote, "rest upon a single premise: that the individual is a member of a community of interdependent parts... The land ethic simply enlarges the boundaries of the community to include soils, waters, plants, and animals, or collectively: the land," and "changes the role of *Homo sapiens* from conquerors of the land-community to plain member and citizen of it."

Fellow citizens of the land community, it's time to get to work. Thank you.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Our friend T. H. Watkins died in 2000, a great loss to the scholarship and advocacy of conservation. Efforts to locate a written copy of his talk were unsuccessful. This paper is a verbatim transcription from a videotape of his presentation at the conference, and appears here with the kind permission of Joan Watkins. Our thanks also to Gordon Brittan of Montana State University for his help with this manuscript. Every attempt has been made to locate and verify editorial details (such as punctuation and spelling in direct quotations) of the paper so that it accurately reflects Tom's intentions. Readers noting any errors of detail please notify the editors at the Yellowstone Center for Resources, P.O. Box 168, Yellowstone National Park, WY 82190.



Superintendent's International Luncheon

CROSSING THE BORDER: THE CONSERVATION MOVEMENT IN CANADA AND THE UNITED STATES

Donald Worster



EDGAR ALLEN POE laid claim to being the first postmodernist when he wrote, “The boundaries which divide Life from Death are at best shadowy and vague. Who shall say where the one ends, and where the other begins?” Substitute the names Canada and United States for “Life” and “Death,” and we get this revised question: Who shall say where the one *nation* ends and the other begins?

Certainly it is not nature that divides our two countries. Nature’s landforms, ecosystems, migration patterns, and flow of waters all ignore the international border. The border is unmistakably a human artifact, a cultural construct imposed on nature. Like all artifacts of culture it varies from mind to mind. However rigid patriots may want to make it, the border must always be shadowy and vague, a permeable line that we cross and re-cross in as many ways as the imagination can conceive.

The hand that drew this long international boundary, running from Puget Sound to the Bay of Fundy, was the nation-state. Its greatest rival in the modern period, the hand of capital, had nothing to do with it. In fact, capitalism has often been frustrated by the border; both nations have set up trade restrictions and immigration patrols to interfere with free enterprise and the flow of labor and commodities to market.

Behind their common border both nations have tried to define and protect a unique “national culture” in which people’s identities, loyalties, and values are determined by the rivalries of nationalism. The American nation-state has been particularly energetic in this project. Yet a distinctive “Canada” has evolved too, separate from the United States and all other nations—a “Canada” that is ardently defended against cultural divisions from within and cultural incursions from without. The very idea of a border depends on maintaining these distinctive national cultures against the persistent desire, the irresistible impulse, to leap over the line.

My question today concerns the conservation movement and how the border between the United States and Canada has influenced that movement. Put another way, how does the history of conservation reflect those constructions of national identity? What is its relation to nationalism and the nation-state? Is there a single “North American” conservation movement, or has the border separated different dynamics and different programs—in effect, different movements?

By conservation I mean any organized effort to protect natural resources from loss or depletion. It is a very old effort, far older than we commonly realize. The first chief forester of the United States, Gifford Pinchot, claimed to have invented

conservation in 1905, adapting it from the government-owned forest lands in India which were called “conservancies.” That was a bit of egoism. In truth, Pinchot simply added a new suffix to an ancient word, “conserve” or “conservacie,” meaning the protection of natural features like rivers or forests from harm or abuse. He did not invent the idea of protection nor did he invent the first movement to protect nature. Conservation in the modern period of history was not even a movement that began in the United States; it originated in England, France, and Germany, and it spread from there to North America. Moreover, it is important to note that, contrary to many interpretations, the conservation movement arrived *simultaneously* in Canada and the United States

Initially, the main issue was protecting forests, though soon protecting birds and game, fisheries and waters, natural beauty and even fossil fuels like coal all became important too. The North American movement for forest conservation dates back to the middle years of the last century. A Massachusetts educator, George B. Emerson, warned about forest depletion as early as 1846, and a Nova Scotia geologist, J. W. Dawson, raised a similar alarm in 1847. Their warnings did not carry much weight.

Three decades later the American Forestry Association was organized in Chicago to beat the drums more loudly, and it was the very next year, 1876, when the Montreal lumberman James Little published his important pamphlet, “The Timber Supply Question of the Dominion of Canada and the United States of America.” All the desolation of war, Little declared, would be “as nothing compared to the terribleness of the calamity that will be experienced from a dearth of timber.”

When the AFA reorganized itself as the American Forestry Congress, James Little was among those present, and he and his brother William brought the Congress to Montreal for its second meeting. The Canadian delegates shared all the concerns of the Americans: keeping timber lands in public ownership; protecting them from illegal trespass, from cattle and sheep grazing, and from agricultural clearance; putting them under the supervision of scientifically trained conservators. The province of Ontario passed the first act on the continent to prevent forest fires, and Americans traveled northward to see how well it was working.

It would be hard then to claim that one country led and the other one followed in this slow nineteenth-century awakening to forest protection. If there were more Americans present at those early meetings, it was because there were more Americans overall; but the Canadians were as deeply worried and as committed to reform. When it came to forests, the international border was no barrier to anxiety or commitment.

The rise of conservation is sometimes explained in Malthusian terms: population increases, it presses on scarce natural resources, conservation appears. But if that is so, why was Canada in such close synchrony with the United States? The ratio of Canadian people to Canadian trees was then, as it is today, the most favorable in the world. What did Mr. Little have to worry about compared to his American counterparts?

Part of the answer lies in the fact that “forest depletion” at that time meant “white pine depletion,” and the supply of that highly desirable species was limited and quickly exhausted on both sides of the border. More important, the supply of

white pines was being gobbled up by a market economy that already, by the 1870s and 1880s, had taken on continental proportions. The capital and labor deployed in cutting white pine was transnational, the market for lumber was transnational, the need and the greed behind forest exploitation were transnational. If Malthusianism was at work, it was Malthusianism that had already transcended national borders.

One of the neglected classics in conservation history is Arthur Lower's study of this cross-border lumber trade, published sixty years ago under the title, *The North American Assault on the Canadian Forest*. Lower pointed out what historians writing from a single-nation perspective have tended to overlook: the entire continent has long been one "great store-house of riches and these riches have been open to any one who had energy enough to seize them." Furs, fish, and forests had all been exploited in turn.

The Canadian forest was first sold to Great Britain in the form of squared timber; then in the form of lumber it began to find its largest market in the United States. Never did Canada harvest its trees to meet Canadian needs alone. It dug the Rideau Canal to get the trees of the Ottawa Valley to foreign markets. It threw railroads across Quebec and Ontario to improve connections with those same markets.

As Harold Innis pointed out in his preface to Lower's book, Canada provided "the scaffolding" on which more than one foreign country completed its industrial revolution. As the United States moved west, as cities like Chicago began to rise from the prairies, as foundries and meatpacking plants proliferated, as a growing American population demanded shelter, indeed as Canadians migrated southward looking for jobs and homes, it was Canadian forests that supplied much of the raw material for America's industrial life. Seeing across borders immediately makes this clear, and it removes any surprise from the fact that Canadians and Americans got anxious together about the future of this important resource.

For more than a century then we have had a shared concern about the North American forests, and forestry experts have been regularly crossing the border. They have developed a common language and program.

At the turn of the century the most influential of these experts was Bernhard Fernow, who could not make up his mind which side of the line he wanted to live on. Trained in forest management in his native Prussia, he emigrated to the United States in 1876, and within a decade became chief of the Division of Forestry in the Department of Agriculture. In 1903 he delivered his famous *Lectures on Forestry* at Kingston's School of Mining. Canadians now heard from him the same message the Americans had heard: "The forest is not merely a mine, but a reproducible resource—a living, growing crop, the product of the soil and climate, which can be reproduced *ad libitum* in even superior quantity and quality to what nature alone and unaided has done." A few years later Fernow became dean of the new forestry school at the University of Toronto.

His border-hopping career demonstrates clearly that the idea of putting forests under scientific management was broadly North American and transatlantic. That management, which Fernow defined as "the rational treatment of the forests as timber producers," seems, as far as the scientific experts were concerned, to have been free of all nationalism or national cultural identity. It was cosmopolitan. It was dedicated to ideals of efficiency and productivity that had little to do with being

American or Canadian.

So forest conservation as practiced by professionals has remained down to this day. The graduates of such forestry schools as Toronto, Cornell, and Yale have moved from country to country seeking, in Fernow's words, "an accumulated wood capital lying idle and awaiting the hand of a rational manager to do its duty as a producer of a continuous highest revenue."

If scientific expertise were all that the conservation movement amounted to, forest protection would indeed be stony ground for nationalism. American conservation would be the same as Canadian conservation, and both would be the same as German or Chinese or Brazilian conservation. The movement could be completely explained by the modernizing, globalizing forces of economy, science, and industrial production. It could be summed up in Samuel Hays's influential phrase, "the gospel of efficiency."

Such a gospel exists, of course, and we see it everywhere in the world. But it does not tell the whole story. The conservation movement was never simply an international technocratic movement. Quite the contrary, it was steeped in nationalism, loaded down with nationalistic feelings, and highly charged by nationalistic rivalries. We will never understand this movement fully if we define conservation merely as a "gospel of efficiency."

Despite so much talk of international cooperation among forestry experts, conservation in North America was from the beginning an intensely nationalistic movement and it has remained nationalistic throughout the twentieth century. It sought the survival of the United States and of Canada as separate, struggling nations in a world economy. Even James Little, the Montreal lumberman, was less concerned about his private affairs or his business prospects than he was about the future of Canada as a going concern. So also south of the border the forests were seen as the very foundation of America's hopes.

Nowhere was this nationalism more passionately expressed than in the presidential administration of Theodore Roosevelt, when conservation became the chief domestic policy priority. Roosevelt, like his friend and advisor Pinchot, was a fervent nationalist, and his concern for protecting natural resources was never very far from his concern for safeguarding the nation's power and wealth.

In 1903 Roosevelt stood before the Society of American Foresters to support their efforts "not as an end in itself, but as a means of preserving the prosperity of the Nation." Four years later he told a gathering of newspaper editors that "the conservation of natural resources and their proper use constitute the fundamental problem which underlies almost every other problem of our National life."

Those were only warm-ups for that extravagant outpouring of patriotic zeal called the Conference of Governors, held at the White House in 1908 to promote the cause of conservation. Roosevelt opened the meeting with one of the most important speeches of his career on "Conservation as a National Duty." He took his listeners back to the country's origins to argue that the very drafting of the Constitution itself had been a response to "the necessity for united action in the wise use of...our natural resources." The merger of thirteen separate colonies under one centralized authority had allowed enormous economic growth to occur. But now the time had come to ask,

“what will happen when our forests are gone, when the coal, the iron, the oil, and the gas are exhausted, when the soils shall have been still further impoverished and washed into the streams, polluting the rivers, denuding the fields, and obstructing navigation.” The union and the Constitution were both put at risk by the waste of resources. Roosevelt concluded, to thundering applause from the governors and other invited guests, that conservation “is but part of another and graver problem to which this Nation is not yet awake, but to which it will awake in time, and with which it must hereafter grapple if it is live—the problem of national efficiency, the patriotic duty of insuring the safety and continuance of the Nation.” Roosevelt succeeded, as no one else had done so well before, in painting the colorless notion of efficiency in blazing national colors of red, white, and blue.

No Canadians were at that 1908 meeting, but several were present one year later when Roosevelt hosted a North American Conservation Conference in Washington. The earlier intense nationalism was tempered a little for the foreign guests from Canada and Mexico. But only a little—this too was a meeting of national patriots, not of mere private citizens or trained foresters or tree lovers.

The declaration of principles that came out of the meeting put the nation-state at the center of concern. “We recognize the mutual interests of the nations which occupy the continent of North America,” the delegates declared, “and the dependence of the welfare of each upon its natural resources. We agree that the conservation of these resources is indispensable for the continued prosperity of each nation.” They acknowledged that “natural resources are not confined by the boundary lines that separate nations”; nonetheless, their intention was not to do away with those boundary lines. Rather, they assembled because they thought it was in the national self-interest of Canada, the United States, and Mexico to work together to conserve “their material foundations.”

The conservation movement, I want to emphasize, was not the child of modern capitalism, which teaches that resources are infinitely abundant and infinitely substitutable. Instead, conservation was largely the child of the nation-state. It spoke the language of boundaries, scarcity, and limits. It talked of citizenship, patriotic duty, and the welfare of posterity.

When Theodore Roosevelt called for protecting resources from the destructive appetites of competition and individualism, from rampant materialism, he was pointedly criticizing capitalism and its ethos. He called for the control of corporations that owed no allegiance to any state. When he held out a hand of cooperation across the border, he was not interested in the survival of forests for their own sake or for the sake of Canada or Canadianism but for the survival of America and Americanism.

Similarly, the delegates Canada sent to the North American conference—Sydney Fisher, Clifford Sifton, and Henri Beland—came not because they cared about forests or nature or even because they cared about humanity in the abstract. They came because they were Canadian nationalists, worried about their country’s future.

Economists have sometimes bemoaned this nationalism in the conservation movement. The Vancouver economist Anthony Scott, for example, has complained that the movement has long been a species of economic protectionism.

Faced with the prospective shortage of some natural asset which has served as source of trade, employment, gold, means of defence, or profit for one social class, each society has collectively taken action to offset depletion. They have justified themselves in a manner reminiscent of advocates of protective tariff policy....The conservationist, in defiance of the theory that the highest income for the world would arise from the free use of resources without barriers to international trade, in effect urges the existence of legal and social barriers to the ability of labour and other factors to move from place to place....

Conservation, as he portrays it in those stiff, academic words, is backward, anti-progressive, and conservative. It has interfered with maximizing wealth and economic growth by promoting an introverted patriotism. Never mind that it has often tried to justify itself in the name of science, efficiency, and modernity. In truth, conservation has been part of the nation-state's protective armor, which, in the eyes of such economists, means it has been unscientific and archaic.

Whether one accepts that criticism or not, conservation does indeed seem to have been an international movement that, paradoxically, has been profoundly nationalistic in its outlook. It is *Canadian* forests that must be protected against rapacious American timber or paper companies. It is *American* minerals that must be protected against ruthless Canadian mining companies, threatening the sanctity of such national symbols as Yellowstone National Park.

The conservation movement was born then in a spirit of nationalism, and its mission was to defend the nation-state against its enemies. But every nation defines itself in more than economic terms. It looks to its land and environment for cultural symbols and meanings as well as for prosperity and wealth. It invests forests, rivers, and other landscapes with high patriotic value and celebrates them in song and anthem: "O, Canada! Our home and native land!...we stand on guard for thee." Conservation has been a movement to protect natural resources but also to protect what each nation regards as its unique cultural assets, indeed its very identity.

No sooner was the North American Conservation Conference of 1909 adjourned than those national cultural differences began to assert themselves. The cause of forests gave way to broader themes. In the United States, I now want to suggest, the popular conservation movement came to focus more and more on the preservation of wilderness and wildness, particularly in national parks, while in Canada the movement focused more on the need for urban and town planning. That divergence, which began to appear in the early twentieth century, would endure right down to the present.

A few weeks after the North American Conservation Conference, President Roosevelt left office, and going out with him went a dream that the United States would set up a permanent national conservation commission with responsibility for planning the country's future. Conservation was to be the foundation of a planned society, but now that planning was put on hold.

If the United States failed to take that next step toward national planning, Canada succeeded, at least for a while. In 1909, Prime Minister Wilfred Laurier appointed Clifford Sifton, a Winnipeg businessman, former Minister of the Interior, and staunch trade protectionist, to head a new conservation commission, a position that Sifton would hold for nearly a decade. As Michel Girard explains, the

commission studied forests, public health, energy, mineral consumption, agriculture, water power, and fish and game. It lasted until 1921. While in existence it marked the formal beginning of Canadian environmental planning, leaving a legacy that the United States would not have until after the New Deal.

In 1911, Canada's Commission of Conservation lobbied to establish a new Rocky Mountain Forest Reserve, covering an area of nearly 18,000 square miles, including the Banff, Waterton Lakes, and Jasper national parks. In the words of the commission, the reserve would create "the largest national park in the world." Their motive was in no small measure to show up the Americans, whose largest park, Yellowstone, established in 1872, would be only one-fifth as large.

Yet the proposed reserve in the Canadian Rockies would not be a national park in the sense that many Americans thought of such places—a strictly protected environment of wild, sublime natural beauty. In fact, the acreage that had been part of Banff and the other two parks was actually *reduced* to allow more room for state-supervised economic exploitation. This new "largest national park in the world" permitted, for example, harvesting timber, working mines, grazing cattle, and constructing dams and hydroelectric generating stations. No one on the commission seemed to find those industrial and agricultural enterprises at all incompatible with the idea of a park.

To Americans, that way of thinking would have seemed strange indeed, for in that same period their own conservation movement was torn asunder by a proposal to build a single dam and reservoir within Yosemite National Park in California. The city of San Francisco wanted to put its water supply within the park, in the glaciated valley called Hetch Hetchy; the conservationist John Muir called it sacrilege and led a nationwide protest to stop it. Despite losing the battle over Hetch Hetchy, Muir and followers made sure that never again would such an invasion be allowed within a national park. As Roderick Nash has written, "they had gained much ground in the larger war for the existence of wilderness."

Muir and company fought a campaign to preserve wilderness as a symbol of American identity. America, in their eyes, was a nation born of the encounter of civilization with wilderness, and to preserve some large, intact part of that wilderness was to preserve the nation's heritage. Wilderness, from that point on, became a political cause of extraordinary complexity and power. It became a battle for the soul of the nation, for moral restraint in a consumer society, for human refuge from technology, for the rights of other species to exist, secure from domination or exploitation, for freedom and liberty in both a human and more than human sense.

Canada did not experience such a pivotal battle in the early part of this century, and it showed much less interest in protecting its vast wilderness. The idea of a national park had first entered Canada thirty years earlier in the form of setting up a European-style spa in the mountains, a project to encourage economic development of the West. From that point on Canadians tended to look on parks almost wholly as places of leisure, recreation, and profit. They were never secular temples where the nation could find its soul.

Perhaps that difference of attitude explains why conservation north of the border tended to remain an official, governmental responsibility rather than becoming a

citizens' movement. In the United States the controversy over Hetch Hetchy stirred up grassroots activism and opened a split between activists and government planners that has never quite healed. Muir, who had been excluded from the Roosevelt conferences, left behind as part of his legacy the Sierra Club, while other organizations like the Audubon Society and the Wilderness Society came on the scene, rallying the public to defend wild, untrammelled nature in the name of conservation.

In contrast, Canadians, writes Janet Foster, long had no effective citizen activism to arouse public opinion and preserve nature. "In the absence of a strong public movement in Canada," she writes, "it was left to the federal government to develop an awareness of the need for wildlife conservation." She shows how a few dedicated officials, James Harkin in particular, did bring something like Muir's vision into public policy, but without a strong citizens movement behind them they did not have the political muscle to make wilderness and wildlife preservation the powerful cause that they became in the United States

I submit that this cultural difference, which was already apparent in the 1910–15 era, has survived to this moment. It explains why Canada today protects less than 3 percent of its gigantic territory from logging, mining, or other forms of economic exploitation (compared to about 8 percent in the United States, if parks and wildlife reserves are included). It explains why the United States has managed to set aside over 100 million acres as wilderness under the strictest protection. It explains why the United States has passed a federal endangered species act and Canada has not. It explains why there still is no nationwide system of wilderness preservation north of the border, though several provinces have made tentative efforts in that direction.

The clear message in these contrasting histories is that wilderness has been a less cherished national ideal among Canadians than Americans, and the reason Americans give for protecting wilderness, as a symbol of their national identity, has been less persuasive across the border.

On the other hand, Canadians seem to have been more interested than Americans in preserving and enhancing the *city* as a symbol of their national identity. From an early point the planning of urban environments claimed a prominent place in their conservation movement. Roosevelt and Pinchot were little interested in urban planning, nor were other early American conservationists, although they did include human health as one of their concerns. In contrast, Canadians moved quickly to incorporate cities into their planning.

Clifford Sifton, the head of the conservation commission, called for setting up "a rational system of Town Planning, a rational system of supervising the conditions in which the people in our great cities shall live," and he described the city as "one of the two or three great problems in the world today." He recruited Dr. C. A. Hodgetts to work for the commission, and Hodgetts immediately defined his job as promoting better housing and more town planning. Hodgetts characterized his country's urban growth as completely chaotic; too much had been left to the real-estate speculator who had no long-term interest in creating a livable community.

For a better model, Hodgetts turned not to the United States and its skyscraper metropolises, which he detested, but to Great Britain and its more human-scale planning tradition. In 1914 the commission lured to Ottawa one of Britain's leading

planners, Thomas Adams, a proponent of the Garden City movement, and put him to work promoting better planning at the local and provincial level. “National prosperity,” Adams told his new audience, “depends on the character, stability, freedom and efficiency of the human resources of a nation, rather than on the amount of its exports or the gold it may have to its credit.”

The Garden City ideal that Adams brought to North America aimed at integrating industry and agriculture by building new decentralized communities on the outskirts of large urban conurbations and surrounding them with green spaces. It proposed to control land speculation by socializing ownership. It looked back to the medieval English village for inspiration, an organic community that had been destroyed by modern economic individualism.

Much of this British ideal did not travel well to North America. Anglophone Canadians, despite their allegiance to things British, were not really ready to adopt that model for their own, and in fact no true garden cities were ever constructed in Canada, although a company town or two was laid out with some of its features. In the early 1920s, as the conservation commission was disbanding, Adams migrated south to the United States, where he became director of the Regional Planning Association of New York. Ironically, it was the United States during the New Deal that carried out plans to disperse population into several new garden cities.

Canadians were, it would seem, less eager than either the British or the Americans to embrace the small, decentralized community ideal; they turned out to be more accepting of the modern trend toward large, densely settled cities. Nonetheless, Adams and the conservation commission helped make urban planning an accepted public function, and the various provinces and municipalities in particular would come to exercise more power over planning the urban environment than their American counterparts. The roots of this Canadian emphasis on urban planning go deep into the past and defy easy summary, but it would appear that Canadians have long looked on cities more positively than Americans.

Part of the reason for that difference lies in different histories and different reactions to Old World imperialism. According to Gilbert Stelter, “the earliest Canadian urban places were essentially garrisons established in a hostile and overwhelmingly non-urban context. They were tiny outposts of European imperial or commercial expansion.” Long after American cities had been given over to laissez-faire capitalism, Toronto, Montreal, Halifax, and Winnipeg were all controlled by imperial officials who saw themselves maintaining beachheads of civilization in a dangerous, uncouth wilderness. Stelter goes on to say that “the elite of Canadian towns usually lived and concentrated their activities at the centre of town, while the lower classes occupied the periphery or outskirts.” Because of this elite control Canada’s central cities were never so wide-open to real estate speculation as in the United States

The Canadian conservation movement then drew on this legacy of imperial concern for the urban environment. It drew on a long established Canadian cultural pattern of preferring civilization over wilderness, one that made urbanism a key part of Canadian self-identity, one that rested on an organic ideal of society that was different from individualistic America.

Canada, admittedly, has seen some tough resistance to government planning; it has tolerated such intervention far less than have many European societies. But a start had been made back in the early part of the twentieth century, one that linked the conservation of resources to the design of livable, socially inclusive cities, and that start would not be forgotten.

During the past fifty years, the early linkage made in Canada between conservation of resources and conservation of cities seems to have become strong once more. It helps explain what many observers, both Canadian and American, have noted: that on the whole Canada's urban environments have become more safe, efficient, and comprehensively planned than in the United States. There are fewer slums, far less crime, fewer guns, better health care for the whole population, more access to mass transportation, more interest in energy conservation, and more urban parks and open spaces.

These characteristics do not all come from the conservation movement; they have other and broader roots. Nor do they necessarily mean that Canadian cities are in every way better than American cities; they are not, for example, less polluted than in the United States. But these contrasting cultural attitudes which have influenced what is meant by conservation in Canada do help us understand better why Toronto is not Detroit nor Vancouver another Los Angeles.

These differences should not be drawn too sharply nor reduced to a pat formula of wilderness-loving Americans versus city-loving Canadians. The United States is one of the world's most urbanized countries, it too has a well-developed profession of urban planning, and its environmental organizations have paid increasing attention to urban ills. Canada, on the other hand, has recently expanded its national park system, particularly across the far north, and Canadian life and literature have increasingly been filled with appealing images of the wilderness.

Yet important differences remain—differences of emphasis. Despite more than a century of border-crossing experts and despite so much mutual agreement on the need to protect and safeguard the natural resource base of the continent, these two nations do not always mean the same thing by conservation.

So much for history. Now for the editorial page. This long linkage between conservation and nationalism can be viewed as more than a relic from the unenlightened past that we should try to put behind us as fast as possible. For the foreseeable future, a strong nation-state seems to be required if we mean to safeguard the earth's environment. In this age of NAFTA and powerful transnational corporations, the nation-state stands as the only effective police power that can set up rules and enforce them, that can protect resources from border marauders. There is as yet no global altruism, no global structure of legislation and enforcement, that can be depended on to look out for Mother Earth.

We are, therefore, forced to rely on those traditions of national self-interest, national pride, and national law-making, traditions that can be, as they have been in the past, mobilized for conservation. A world suddenly bereft of all borders would be, at the current stage of human evolution, a world without much conservation at all. I speak now not about protecting jobs or languages, both of which also look to the nation-state for a defense against incursions across the border. I speak only

of protecting the earth and its resources from degradation. Until global capitalism withers away, or until the whole world comes to share a single environmental ethic, backed up by a single international authority, the nation-state remains an indispensable institution.

But if we still need the nation-state as an institution, do we also need to keep promoting nationalism or separate national identities in conservation, which tend to separate us from one another? Do we need to insist on a Canadian conservation movement distinctive and separate from an American one? This is a harder question to answer, and I cannot offer a simple reply.

The nation-state, it seems to me, will crumble without a national culture to support it. We cannot, therefore, expect to protect the environment without, to some extent, protecting national traditions or without firing up national pride. Saving the bald eagle or the Grand Canyon or the cultural life of Montreal will require us, for a good long while yet, to excite passions, and those passions will include the passions of nationalism. Yet we know that those passions can destroy as well as protect. They can turn nasty toward foreigners and strangers. They can be ungenerous and violent. They can transform forests into fortresses.

While the nation-state remains an indispensable institution, all nations seem to be moving toward a more open, shifting sense of their identity, and surely this is a good thing. International borrowing is as active in conservation as it is in music or literature or food ways, and such border-crossing is the pathway toward a more tolerant, peaceful global future. United States should open its borders to *ideas* about conservation that are different from our own; we could, for example, learn much from Canada's success in creating decent urban environments, requiring the expenditure of substantial public funds on mass transit, energy conservation, and decent housing and health care for all.

Conversely, Canadians, who possess so much of the world's remaining wild lands, might profit from the American example and try to protect even more vigorously that wild heritage in the north from economic exploitation. Both nation's environmentalists could cross the international border more often and bring home a few ideas from the other side.

One of the great challenges of the next few decades will be to control the exploitative energies set loose by a border-jumping, transnational capitalist economy while, at the same time, keeping those borders open to the flow of people, culture, and ideas. This is not a challenge posed to conservationists in North America uniquely; it is a challenge posed all over the planet.

If you believe as I do that the conservation movement has become vital to that global human condition, that both the earth and all species, including its most numerous large species, *Homo sapiens*, depend on meeting that challenge successfully, then you must agree that conservationists in both our countries need to be thinking seriously about borders. We must decide how and how often we want to cross that long, shadowy line that divides our common continent.

Donald Worster, Hall Distinguished Professor of American History, Dept. of History—
University of Kansas, 1445 Jayhawk Blvd., Room 3001, Lawrence, KS 66045-7590

Concluding Summary

NOTES ON THE REALITY OF YELLOWSTONE

Gordon Brittan



ONE WHO CONCLUDES a program always has four tasks. The first is to be brief. I shall.

The second task is just as easy. It is to thank the organizers and everybody who helped them in various ways for a superbly organized and very stimulating conference. As is the case with the best of conferences, I leave with more questions than answers.

The third task is much more difficult. It is to try to summarize what went on. In fact, a great many things went on, too many to summarize briefly or coherently. But very roughly, I would bring them under five headings (at that, not everything fits neatly). Each has to do with our activity as humanists. All are auxiliary to our central aim, heightening self-consciousness.

1. **Clarifying the experience** (very possibly what humanists do best). This involves illuminating the unique and particular, unfolding layers of complexity. Here it had to do with the art about and inspired by Yellowstone and with the history of architecture in the park, what we're looking at, i.e., what it expresses, and how we respond. It also had to do with visitation, how we're perceiving, feeling, behaving and where we lodge, eat, and sleep. Of particular interest were the narratives of women coming early to this place and to this area. Under this same general heading, I would put appreciation and preservation of cultural resources. If nothing else, this conference has underlined their importance and the ways in which they integrate, in the perspective of time, with the more narrowly natural phenomena we first wanted to preserve.
2. **Revising the history.** Of note here were the rejections of the Madison campfire story concerning the origins of the park, of various received truths about the "Sheepsteater" Indians and their allegedly marginal character, and of the supposedly monolithic and superstitious attitudes of the Native American tribes who frequented this area. In every case, much more plausible accounts were given to replace them.

I want to make two further comments in this connection. One is that the revisions were in the interest of getting the history straight, in the direction of

truth. Perhaps it does not need repeating, but history, anthropology, archeology are all truth-seeking disciplines.

The other comment is that the revisions do not necessarily bend to the socio-political winds, or accord with what we would like to be the case. I have told the Madison campfire story a hundred times. Our children were raised on it. It is an inspiring story, and I keep telling it to myself to motivate my own efforts to effect large changes in small ways. I will give it up reluctantly. But it is not true. That is what matters most.

3. **Understanding the science (and its relation to public policy).** Thus the blister rust wars, the Leopold Report, and early ecological rationales for Yellowstone. But we also had, to my immense interest, a session on the indigenous knowledge of nature. Perhaps some day such knowledge, still in the process of being made explicit, will be more widely valued and eventually be brought to bear on the formation of public policies.
4. **Establishing the (cultural, economic, social, political) context.** The context is both immediate, the Greater Yellowstone, regional, the tri-state area around the park, and national. Under this heading I am putting the discussions we heard of wolves, brucellosis, and predator control, all of them appealing to local, regional, and national considerations, as well as the discussions of capital and labor and the bearings of culture, expressive and determining of our understanding of the park and of the roles it has played.
5. **Examining the idea(s)** of Yellowstone Park and of the Greater Yellowstone ecosystem. Under this heading, I'm putting the international comparisons and the various cross-national perspectives surveyed, as well as the motives behind park designation and ecosystemic cooperation and the ways in which these motives might be realized.

All of these headings cut across, as is typical of the humanities, questions of fact and questions of value. At this conference, the answers given to these questions were, generally, so various that some uncertainty concerning the park, and its "idea," was suggested. I will return to this point in a moment.

The fourth task falling to me is most difficult of all: to put the discussion in larger perspective. I must add that however difficult this task, it is part of a philosopher's job description.

One reason for the difficulty is that the discussion, as already noted, has ranged back and forth between the park itself and the Greater Yellowstone, between the Native American and the Euro-American experience of it.

So far as the history of the park itself is concerned, it is so brief, even on a human time scale, that the history we are writing now is virtually contemporary history. I first came here almost fifty years ago, and have thus been witness to roughly 40 percent of

the park's history. My father, still alive, has bridged more than 75 percent of it.

But contemporary history is the most difficult of all to write, since we can gauge the significance of events, and hence their appropriate descriptions, the ways in which they are to be understood, only long after the fact, in the light of what subsequently transpires. One can know to some degree or other what past events have meant, but never, trying to be as self-conscious as possible, what they mean.

So we're still too close, even to the establishment of the park and its early years, to assess their significance with any depth or accuracy. Indeed, I think there's more consensus in this room concerning what we *ought* to do as a matter of policy than on what we *are* doing as future generations might describe it.

Just how close in time we are to the establishment of the park was brought home to me in a session on indigenous peoples and national parks. The discussion was fascinating. It concerned whether and on what terms indigenous peoples could reclaim traditional hunting and gathering rights in the park, and perhaps also a role in its management. I realize that a variety of factors are at stake. Native America, by insisting on its sovereignty, has at long last drawn the attention of a dominant culture ready for the first time to listen to, if not also accommodate it. This conference underlined the fact. But surely an important ingredient in the situation is that firm precedents with regard to the Native role have not yet been set. Otherwise, one would have expected the issues involved to have been thrashed out long ago.

So I, at any rate, have difficulty putting what we have been up to in any more than a very tentative historical perspective. It is too short. No great over-arching themes, no insightful and embracing concepts from this perspective have yet emerged. But a geological perspective is much too long. I suggest, in my typical Goldilocks sort of way, a biological perspective, in the hope that it might be more satisfactory if not just right.

It must be admitted from the outset that it is difficult to apply this perspective in an entirely coherent way. It quickly develops paradoxes.

One paradox, of course, is that the park was set aside as a protected area, a sanctuary or refuge *for* wildlife, open landscapes, thermal features, and *from* the modern world, more or less safe from our depredations, when the argument for setting it aside in the first place was that it would be for us humans' benefit, as if we needed to be protected from ourselves, in our own interest.

This paradox can be resolved if we distinguish between the public good and private benefit, and argue that the designation of this area as a national park had to do with the former and not the latter.

I am worried, incidentally, that the idea of parks, and their protection, as a public good is being undermined just as steadily as we are undermining the idea of public universities as public goods, by raising fees and tuitions on the argument that those who visit and attend them benefit personally, and therefore must pay for the privilege. Small increases in fees, at the very least to stay even with inflation, are justified, but the desire to make this park economically "self-sufficient" undoes one motive for which it was first established. If the designation and preservation of this park is not a public good, then we may well ask what is.

This is one place where, following Tom Watkin's remarks on Monday night, we

have to draw a line in the sand and resist significant fee increases.

But even on this resolution of the paradox, distinguishing the general interest for which the park was established from the private interest of those who would harm it in a variety of ways for their own profit, the underlying idea of removal or withdrawal or protection has led to all kinds of questions concerning the proper role of human beings here, and a variety of attempts, perhaps not yet successful, to answer them. Although these past several days we have been celebrating people in this place, our role remains unclear and unsure.

Everything depends in an obvious way on an understanding of who and what we are, or possibly better, on who or what we should be. The understanding of our role apparently built into the whole idea of the park involves a reconstrual of ourselves as something other than what we are in the biological scheme of things, a dominant predator. But this would seem to nullify from the outset our taking a biological perspective.

One further corollary of this paradox is worth mentioning (I puzzle about it a great deal of the time, particularly since, as will become clearer in a moment, I'm so committed to the scientific view of reality). It is that if we are to understand how natural processes work "on their own," so to speak, we must intervene systematically in nature. Science is not a passive, note-taking enterprise. It requires intervention, among other things attaching radio collars to wild animals, in which case, even if it is a matter of degree, we might wonder about the extent to which the processes are natural.

A second paradox distances us in the same sort of way from other species and from the way in which, at present, we tend to see the park. It is that the park is to one extent or another an "untrammelled" wilderness, where natural processes more or less take their course (forgetting what I just said), and animal populations are "naturally regulated," while with regard to our own species we are not content to let "nature take its course," and have built an impressive array of ethical arguments to support our behavior in this regard.

Indeed, these arguments are sometimes used to criticize the policy of "natural regulation" in the case of other animals, culling or harvesting being held morally preferable (on a calculation of pleasures and pains) to malnutrition and starvation (words which defenders of park policy, like John Varley, claim are at best very misleading).

Let me now start down a different trail, although as is the case except when we lose our way, I hope eventually to circle back to the place where we began.

Listening to some of the speakers at this conference, it is difficult to avoid coming to the conclusion that there are many Yellowstones, each at least in part a function of the way in which it is both construed and perceived. Different generations, different economic classes, even different tribes, each has its "own" Yellowstone, a fact reflected in the widely varying management goals of successive park administrations.

I've just finished reading Paul Schullery's wonderful book, *Searching for Yellowstone*, and even here there's a suggestion that the search is generational, culturally conditioned. Different people look for, and therefore find, a very different place.

Schullery aside for a moment, it has become fashionable, at least among academic humanists, to talk about reality as a “social construction,” the way in which different communities give form, largely linguistic form, to their experience. On this reading, the park is a kind of cultural artefact, changing with the times and expressing, as the case may be, nostalgia for a simpler and more pristine America or nationalistic pride in our geographical uniqueness or the desire to conduct animal experiments on an ecosystemic scale, attitudes which themselves derive, at least according to the cynical, from an existing set of power relationships and a half-conscious manipulation of the instruments of public information.

Here, for example, is a sampling of various views along these lines from this conference (not all of them, I hasten to add, cynical):

1. “Yellowstone is, at base, a cultural experience, its meaning and importance varying among individuals and dependent upon interpretation. Over the past 100 years, concessionaires have quietly dictated how visitors see the park.”
2. “The tendency to render the thermal landscape of Yellowstone as the site of the feminine/domestic as well as the markedly profane, I argue, arises from a dominant cultural ideology which expressed its revulsion of women’s labor in manifold ways, and which, moreover, had long projected feminine stereotypes of erratic behavior upon natural forces inherently beyond the control of human attempts to harness and control them.”
3. “Among the patterns I will consider are (1) the layering of acts of looking, in which one person’s visual activity itself becomes the object of spectatorship by others, (2) the construction of ‘visual authority’ as something that moves consistently among different positions in a circuit of desire, (3) the thoroughly destabilized nature of visual experience in modern mass tourism.”
4. “The paper will underscore the paradox and limitations of the national park idea and the conservation impulse in America, as well as the predominantly cultural value of Yellowstone wildlife.”
5. “In a more general and philosophical sense this paper seeks to understand how national parks can help form nature and our sense of individuality through the regulation of vision.”

Perhaps by this time, you begin to get the idea.

In fact, there is something to it. Who can deny that our perception of things is not in part colored by our cultural and personal contexts, a matrix of desire, belief, and attitude? When Susan Neel, for example, argues that “wildness is a cultural construct,” it is not difficult to see what she is driving at. “Wildness” is inevitably contrasted with some view of what constitutes “normality,” a view which is descriptive and normative at the same time, and changing meaning as the strategic uses to which it is put vary. There is also, as Tom Watkins pointed out the other night, a certain

measure of humility implied by “social construction” positions; each of us is, after all, a child of the times, and no one has a lock on the truth.

It is just that when pushed too far these positions become implausible. I do not want to go into all of the problems with the notion of “reality as social construction,” or of the park as cultural artefact, although some of the problems touch on the paradoxes with which we began. It is enough for my purposes to mention two of these problems.

One is that it is difficult to assess the perspective from which the charge of “social construction” is made. Is this perspective not itself a “social construction,” mired in its own matrix of belief and desire? If it is not, then on what grounds can this be established? What special authority does this perspective or the person taking it have?

The other problem is that if *everything* is a “social construction,” then the notion has no work to do, for (like “wildness”) the notion is parasitic upon an implicit contrast with “reality.”

Moreover, if one wants to say that our contemporary mainstream Western conception of reality which is based on science is a “social construction,” then one must also admit that it is not of the garden variety. For as Donald Worster noted in passing at lunch yesterday, the community rules by which scientific conclusions are reached are uncompromising and universal and in no way arbitrary. That is to say, it is possible to make out a special case for the authority of conclusions made with their disciplined use.

Now back to Schullery. In fact, his book does not simply record generational difference and cultural change, it records *progress* (which is not simply “socially constructed;” at this point I part company from the remarks on this subject made in the last half hour by my friend Susan Neel). We have a much larger and deeper understanding of this area now than when it was set aside in 1872, an understanding informed both by the experience of generations and by science. This greater understanding is manifest in this conference.

By “science,” I mean biology. For the reality of the park disclosed by science, however much it has been tempered by social and economic demands (particularly with regard to the *focus* of the research carried out) is a biological reality, the inevitable theme of Schullery’s book, as it must be of every thoughtful reflection on the reality of the park.

This hasn’t been understood by everybody right from the start. It takes time to come to self-consciousness. But it is an idea to which, once introduced and explained, there is little real resistance. In fact, I think that there is a thread running through all of the various things that people have written and said about Yellowstone over the years, even in the sometimes off-the-wall comments related by Patricia Limerick yesterday evening. It is that it enforced or re-enforced a sense of biological continuity and of our place in a larger scheme of things, although, another paradox, it was often unclear how to frame the terms on which we “belonged.”

Philosophy, Aristotle said, begins with wonder and awe. Who has experienced the park in any more than a fleeting way and not felt both? Wonder and awe are, with the right sort of education, transformed into understanding. There have been many

changes in the park since I first came here. But along with more people and more cars, there are also more rangers and story-boards targeted on science, and much less garbage along the roads.

It needs to be stressed how important education is to the development of perception and of understanding. We miss, but for their having been pointed out to us, objects which are otherwise near at hand and we fail, except when instructed, to grasp their complexity. This is true generally, but nowhere more than here. We need much more parks-related education, and I support enthusiastically the efforts of my friend Peter Brinkley to establish privately-supported educational centers in or near the most well-attended of them.

To say that the reality of Yellowstone is ultimately biological is not very helpful. There are so many things we don't understand about natural history, or about evolutionary biology, which is in an exciting developmental stage at the moment, or about the various processes in play here. For one thing, we don't yet really understand the role of fire (or so I would claim) and we don't yet really know whether large mammals, in this landscape and with the set of constraints at hand, will reach stable population levels over relatively short periods of time. Indeed, we don't yet understand our role as dominant predator, or what adaptive value relinquishing that role in places like Yellowstone might have.

But to say that the reality of Yellowstone is ultimately biological does have certain implications.

One implication is trite. As the expression "natural history" suggests, biology deals with change. The park will change, in unpredictable ways, whatever we do, as will the character of our appreciation of it. My own hopeful thought, on the basis of reading books like Schullery's, is that this latter will also continue to deepen. As appreciative as, for example, John Muir was (and Schullery quotes him to great effect at the close of his book), he really did not begin to fathom the complexity of the natural processes taking place here. He only guessed at them.

Other implications are more significant. We move the bears, not because we are worried about the quality of their summer diet or about their increasing frequency around campgrounds, but because in their begging attitudes along the roads, they are no longer bears, addressing us in their own right as animals rightly to be feared, products of their own evolutionary history and with their own demands, desires, and beliefs.

The German philosopher Hegel once wrote that the master who does not recognize and respect the slave as a human being loses his own humanity in the process. His point was that our humanity depends on being identified in a community of others who in essential respects are like us. The "I" requires a "we." In a world where the grizzly, feeding in dumps under the glare of automobile headlights, is similarly incapable of recognizing and respecting us, it is we who lose something of ourselves in the process. At long last realizing this, we close the dumps, however difficult the transition back to a more natural state, in which we and it are parts of an extended biological community, the grizzly must go through.

The wolf demands recognition and respect. It is for this reason primarily, and not for ungulate reduction or tourist attraction, that we re-introduce it. If we were

not worried about them, if they didn't inspire fear, they wouldn't be wolves, and by the same token we wouldn't be, to the same rich degree, human beings.

Taking the biological perspective forces us in this way, I believe, to try to consider other species, even the environments in which they live, on their own terms, for it is on these terms that they enter natural history if not our own. Considering them in this way, we at the same time enlarge the boundaries of our community.

Moreover, in taking the biological perspective in a larger and deeper way, we begin, perhaps, to resolve our initial paradoxes and to bring ourselves closer to the reality that is Yellowstone.

But there's the rub. In bringing ourselves closer to Yellowstone, in becoming part of its history rather than it becoming part of ours (and both have been talked about here the last several days), we have to face up to what seem to be harsh truths: that we are both predator and prey, that nature has little concern for individuals (if indeed she cares for species), and that (although this is at present a matter of great controversy which we are far from resolving) instability, not equilibrium, is the rule. Plato was very possibly wrong—truth and goodness, fact and value, biology and philosophy, may not go together, however much we have tried to make them one in this place for the past 125 years. That we have tried to do so, and will undoubtedly go on trying, says a great deal about ourselves and about the world we inhabit.

Gordon Brittan, Department of History and Philosophy, Montana State University,
Bozeman, MT 59715



